# Good Thoughts on Folklore and Mythology
## Festschrift in Honour of Terry Gunnell

## Volume 1. FOLKLORE

*Edited by*
Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, Felix Lummer, Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir,
Katrin Lisa van der Linde Mikaelsdóttir
and Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir

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Professor Terry Gunnell
(photograph by Kristinn Ingvarsson)

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# INTRODUCTION

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir,[*] Felix Lummer,[**]
Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir,[***]
Katrín Lísa van der Linde Mikaelsdóttir,[****]
Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir[*****]

It was a lucky strike for Iceland when a young man from Britain went to Norway for a holiday early in the seventies. There he met a young Icelandic woman – and guess what happened! Terry and Tobba fell in love and he followed her to her homeland, they got married and have lived in Iceland ever since.

In all the years following, Terry Gunnell has been an invaluable asset to Icelandic scholarship in Old Norse mythology and folklore, first as an inspiring and much loved teacher in English and comparative literature at the Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð, later as a powerful primus motor in the development of what is now the Faculty of Sociology, Anthropology and Folkloristics, where he has been employed since 1998, first as lecturer, then as associate professor from 2000, and professor since 2010. With Terry's entrance into the university the department flourished. Students started to flock into courses in Old Norse mythology and folkloristics, drinking deeply from his vast knowledge of his topics and his gripping and inspiring ways to communicate it. One of Terry's largest projects and consequently greatest feats was to change the idea of folkloristics from an old-fashioned study in

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descriptive ethnography into modern studies in modern subjects; bringing it home to students that exploration of modern life´s intricacies also was folkloristics.

Another such contribution, and of similar importance, was to renew interest in Old Norse mythology, not only in Iceland but also abroad, attracting students from far and wide to the Old Norse courses at the University of Iceland, riding and contributing to the international wave of interest in the Viking Age. This resulted in innumerable essays and other treatments (even movies) on matters no one had imagined could be considered of importance anymore, let alone the subject of a university degree.

But this was not his only mission.

Taking up on Bertha Phillpotts' (1920) considerations on the performative aspects of Eddic poetry early in the 19th century, Terry, in his PhD research, revolutionized scholarly views and opinions about the function of Eddic poetry, showing through incontestable research that Philpotts had been on the right track in suggesting that many of the eddic mythological poems must have been performed in some way or another in their original social context. With thorough philological, textual and source critical research as well as other serious investigations, he showed indisputably (as far as that may be possible) that during their era of importance, many of the Eddic poems must have been performed and recited to an audience (large or small) in the Old Norse societies and communities of the northernmost part of Europe. During the compilation of these two honorary volumes (and long before, to tell the truth) we (the editors) have come to the conclusion that Rory McTurk must have been quite proud of his student.

This editorial committee consists of co-workers/colleagues and former students of Terry, either as master students, PhD students – or even both.

Sitting in on Terry's lectures or conference papers is an experience. Alongside an avalanche of knowledge one witnesses a performance, extremely clearly structured, completely dedicated and passionate and last but not least expressive to the highest degree. Warmth, encouragement, strong and qualitative demands as well as generous and productive discussions are Terry's hallmark towards both his students and his peers. You always leave his company feeling better, stronger and more optimistic.

Terry's pioneering and extensive research of Old Norse mythology as well as Icelandic legends and folk belief, followed up with incredibly many articles on both subjects, has earned him a worldwide reputation in the field of folkloristics.

Finally Terry's musical prowess should also be briefly mentioned. His musical interests range far and wide, from recreated medieval music (Einar Selvik and Wardruna) to rock (The Beatles, Ry Cooder etc., etc.,) to folk music, finding expression in his membership in the band Einbreið brú (One Lane Bridge) where he plays guitar and sings. Einbreið brú has performed on multiple occasions in Iceland and has always been a great success.

It has been a joy to compile this Festchrift. The incredible response, all the many and excellent articles that were contributed, the happiness of everyone hearing of the project, the willingness of everyone approached to help, whether it was peer-reviewing, proof-reading, sponsoring, editing or just sharing a glass of wine when the stress escalated — all these have been extraordinary. The only real problem has been to keep the project secret to Terry himself.

It is our pleasure to express our best thanks to everyone who has contributed to this Festschrift in one way or another, including the authors of the articles, the peer-reviewers, proof-readers and the publisher. Very special thanks go to our sponsors who made this project financially possible.

# TERRY GUNNELL: A PREFATORY NOTE

Andrew Wawn*

On the evening of 17 February 1993 Terry Gunnell gave what may have been his first-ever formal academic lecture, to the Félag íslenskra fræða at Skólabær on Suðurgata in Reykjavík. His subject was 'Notes on the edge: samanburður á spássíumerkingum fyrir mælendur í Edduhandritum og í evrópskum leikritahandritum á miðöldum,' and the present writer was among those present. The paper itself was a *tour de force*, as was the speaker's deft handling of the ensuing discussion and debate. Now, some thirty years later, I find myself comparing that memorable occasion with the very funny fictional account of another meeting of the same society in Þórarinn Eldjárn's short story 'Síðasta rannsóknaræfingin' [The Last Symposium; in his 1981 collection *Ofsögum sagt*]. In this tale the visiting speaker was Professor dr. Werner von Grau from Sassnitz University, whose topic was the influence of E.T.A. Hoffmann on the poetry of Jónas Hallgrímsson. There are some similarities between the two gatherings: a packed audience, an *útlendingur* lecturing in Icelandic, a new theory being proposed, and, after a break for refreshments, forensic questioning from senior Icelandic Studies specialists. There were also, blessedly, significant differences between 1981 fiction and 1993 reality: Professor dr. von Grau's paper lasted for 3 hours, much to the irritation of audience members, whereas Terry spoke engagingly for just 50 minutes; his theories were substantive and persuasive, whereas those of the visiting German were desiccated and dotty, and the response of his local interlocutor, the much vaunted Professor Skorrdal, was condescending and tetchy; and, at the end of the respective meetings, Terry's audience headed home happy, whereas von Grau's listeners all died in agony within the hour, poisoned by the *hákarl* bits served as an interval snack.

'Síðasta rannsóknaræfingin' depicts, both literally and metaphorically, both amusingly and yet with apparent authorial exasperation, the potential death of Icelandic Studies in Iceland, whereas Terry's paper hinted at several areas of potential growth and renewal both in Iceland and much further afield. Among these we might list the

* Hoylake, Merseyside, UK.

remarkable opening up of medieval and post-medieval manuscript studies that digitalisation would soon encourage; a more nuanced exploration of the porous boundaries between orality and literacy; closer consideration of the interplay between old northern canonical texts and folkloric tradition across the Scandinavian diaspora and beyond; and more determined interdisciplinary study of pre-Christian religion in the north. The 1993 Skólabær evening also had immediate career development implications for the guest lecturer. Terry was soon teaching courses in folkloristics at the University of Iceland, his 'book of the (Leeds University doctoral) thesis' (*The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*) was published in 1995, and thereafter his appointment to a full-time position at Háskóli Íslands was not long delayed. In 'Síðasta rannsóknaræfingin' the food-poisoning episode had paved the way for Jóhann Einarsson, the lone survivor, to be appointed to the suddenly very vacant Chair of Icelandic Studies at HÍ. Jóhann, a dysfunctional scholar, a hopeless high-school teacher, and eventually a lowly bank clerk, suffered a breakdown when confronted by his new professorial responsibilities and was taken away by the authorities, mumbling the famous dying words of Snorri Sturluson in 1241. Terry has shown over four decades that he is made of much sterner stuff. A certificated and successful teacher well before his HÍ appointment, he became an exemplary university pedagogue, challenging and inspiring the many undergraduate and graduate students who took his courses or wrote dissertations under his supervision. Moreover, like Shakespeare's Puck, Terry's many frequent-flyer miles have helped him to 'put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes' in establishing—and sustaining—fruitful collaboration with scholars of Icelandic studies and folklore in many countries. He also found himself much in demand as a level-headed and painstaking external examiner at those institutions.

In *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Jonathan Swift may have mocked the (London) Royal Society's serried ranks of witless 'projectors,' but modern academic life now revolves around such funding bodies and the (generally more worthwhile) projects they support. The system requires colleagues who can identify viable topic areas, assemble a team of simpatico researchers, prepare persuasive funding proposals, organise accompanying colloquia, create project websites and databases, initiate the 'book of the conference papers,' edit contributions and then proofread, for example, the 840 pages of the award-winning *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (2007). Terry is an old and indefatigable hand in all these dark arts, having started early and unobtrusively when seeing safely through the press English language versions of two volumes by his colleague and mentor Professor Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson. The only time I ever heard him complain about workload was when he was *not* invited to annotate an English translation of Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1940), published by the Viking Society in 2003. And, even after his own doctoral dissertation had been published (the *doktorsefni* had appeared before the Leeds examiners wearing his old school tie—*sjaldséðir eru hvítir hrafnar*), and the conference volumes edited, the plenaries delivered, and the Zoom sessions concluded, Terry has always been willing to go the extra cross-platform, multi-media mile. Well suited for this by training (a University of Birmingham Drama and Theatre Arts graduate) and temperament ('the roar of the greasepaint, the smell of the

crowd'/'it's all about performance'), he has banged the drum far and wide in promoting the richness, diversity and accessibility of Iceland-related folkloric studies. Themes successfully highlighted in his own work have included the collection and creation of national folk narratives in northern Europe, Romantic nationalism and Icelandic iconography, 'space and place' eco-narratives, and the institutionalisation of culture in nineteenth-century Reykjavík, a topic that found exemplary expression in his (jointly edited with Karl Aspelund) *Málarinn og menningasköpun: Sigurður Guðmundsson og kvöldfélagið 1858–74* (2017). Terry's background initiatives and foreground appearances on radio and television in and well beyond Iceland, not to mention his summer performances for hotel guests in Balestrand on Sognefjord in Norway, and his Christmas talks for children at Þjóðminjasafnið, have ensured that many other aspects of myth and folklore have gained more attention and traction in popular culture than might otherwise have been the case. The daunting range and reach of these activities is well reflected in the lengthy list of contributors to the present volume and in the uniform warmth of their tributes.

A last thought. After Terry has read and responded to all the papers in his *Festschrift*, we may wonder how he will occupy his time in retirement. The likely answer is: in much the same workaholic way that he occupied himself before retirement. Yet should gaps start opening up in his diary, it may be time for him to change tack and buy a dog or, even better, take up golf; the links on Seltjarnarnes are just a stone's throw from the family home. To help him overcome his *Guardian*-reader disdain, and conscious of his unchanged (since 1975) musical tastes, I note recent remarks from an American golf podcaster on the changing face of the game: 'it's not a sport for geeks anymore … of course, the rock musicians still keep it secret … [Bob] Dylan, you know … loved golf … he played a ton of golf, but he kept it so secret. Neil Young, too, he plays golf. I found this out recently, totally keeps it … down low, because you know, it might taint the image of the artist.' Perhaps we may look forward to Professor Gunnell appearing on the first tee at Nesklúbburinn in Peter Millar polo, cashmere cardigan and bucket hat, all in his favourite 'image of the artist' shade of black. As an *hommage* to his 1991 Leeds doctoral defence, and to his cameo appearance as a white-coated (and implausibly long-haired) British naval scientist in the Baltasar Kormákur movie *Djúpið* (2012), we may even find him reunited with his old school tie, holding court in the golf clubhouse—'no jeans or tank tops, please.' But until then may his richly deserved retirement be long, contented and full of good cheer.

# LEIKUR GOTANNA

Vilborg Davíðsdóttir

Frá því að ég kynntist Terry Gunnell á fyrsta ári aldarinnar, þegar ég hóf nám í þjóðfræði við Háskóla Íslands, hefur hann í ótal skipti verið mér innan handar um alls kyns fróðleik og ábendingar um efni sem ég hef nýtt mér við skrif sögulegra skáldsagna minna. Ekki er til sú spurning tengd norrænni trú, eddukvæðum, Íslendingasögum og þjóðtrú jafnt á Bretlandseyjum sem Norðurlöndum að samtali okkar þar um hafi ekki verið fylgt eftir með fjórum og upp í átta fræðigreinum í tölvupóstinum, jafnt eftir hann sjálfan sem aðra. Við upphaf kynna okkar var Terry að ritstýra greinasafninu *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (Gunnell 2007) sem á endanum varð þykkasta kilja allra tíma og undrar engan sem hann þekkir og veit hversu annt honum er um að áhugaverðu efni séu gerð ítarleg skil. Sjálf ólst ég upp við grímu- og heimsóknasið á þrettándanum á Þingeyri við Dýrafjörð og eftir að hafa verið viðmælandi Terrys í rannsókn hans sjálfs árið 2001 varð úr að ég skrifaði BA ritgerð undir handleiðslu hans og kafla í greinasafnið um slíka siði miðsvetrar á Íslandi (Vilborg Davíðsdóttir 2007). Síðar leiðbeindi Terry mér við skrif MA ritgerðar í þjóðfræði um sagnalist á Hjaltlandseyjum þar sem mér opnaðist ný sýn á hvernig eyjaklasinn er í þjóðfræðilegu tilliti eins og brú á milli Bretlandseyja og Íslands. Sem má kannski einnig segja um Terry Adrian Gunnell sjálfan.

Hér á eftir fara tvö kaflabrot úr nýjustu skáldsögu minni sem ber titilinn *Land næturinnar* (Vilborg Davíðsdóttir 2023) en hún gerist um aldamótin 900 á slóðum væringja í Austurvegi, þar sem í dag eru Rússland, Úkraína og Istanbul í Tyrklandi. Textinn ber ýmis merki samstarfs okkar Terrys í gegnum tíðina, meðal annars í vísun í grímuklæddar konur við dísablót (sjá einnig Gunnell 2000; 2021), í lýsingu á grímubúningi Björns austræna um vetrarsólstöður og síðast en ekki síst á hringdansi væringjanna í virki Hræreks Hólmgarðsjarls við Dnépur. Terry benti mér fyrir allnokkrum árum á textann sem ég byggi þennan dans einkum á, í ritinu *De Ceremoniis* eftir keisarann Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus sem ríkti yfir austrómverska keisaradæminu á árunum 913 til 959. Þar segir frá helgisiðum og athöfnum við hirðina í Konstantínópel, eða Miklagarði eins og borgin hét í munni norrænna manna á fyrri öldum, meðal annars svonefndum Gothikon, eða leik Gotanna, sem fluttur var á níunda

degi jóla við keisarahirðina. Terry skrifaði fyrst um Gothikon-kaflann í bók sinni *The Origin of Drama in Scandinavia* árið 1995 (Gunnell 1995). Þar ræðir hann rök fyrir því að það hafi verið norrænir menn í lífvarðasveit keisararans sem hafi flutt hirðinni leik Gotanna og flutningurinn árstíðabundið ritúal um vetrarsólstöður. Sjálfri finnst mér meira en líklegt að hróp þeirra „tul, tul“ hafi upprunalega verið „jul, jul“ og einhvers konar ákall til yfirnáttúrulegra vætta, dansinn nauðsynlegur til þess að tryggja ris sólar að nýju. Úr því fæst auðvitað aldrei skorið með fullkominni vissu en að minnsta kosti er víst að ýmislegt annað og meira en einn bókstafur hefur færst úr skorðum við endurteknar afritanir fornra handrita í gegnum margar aldir. Kosturinn við að skrifa sögulega skáldsögu er auðvitað sá að þar má geta í eyðurnar og fljúga yfir sviðið á vængjum ímyndunaraflsins, kröfurnar allt aðrar þar en gerðar eru til fræðilegs texta. Samt sem áður hefur mér ávallt fundist mikilvægt að lýsa samfélagi norrænna manna á heiðnum tíma þannig að það sé eins nálægt sanni og kostur er. Við það hefur Terry Gunnell veitt mér ómetanlega hjálp um langt árabil; hafi hann mínar einlægustu þakkir fyrir.

Fyrra kaflabrotið er skrifað út frá sjónarhorni aðalpersónu skáldsögunnar, Þorgerðar Þorsteinsdóttur, sonardóttur Auðar djúpúðgu, en það síðara frá sjónarhorni grísks þræls, sem fékk nafn sitt, Krios, úr forngrísku goðsögunni um Jason og Argóarfarana; það merkir „hrútur.“ Hrútur hét einnig sonur Þorgerðar og Herjólfs Eyvindarsonar, sem segir frá í Laxdælu og Njálu. Vetrarsólstöðum er hér fagnað í Sýrnesi sem stendur út í fljótið Dnépur, þar sem nú er Gnezdovo í Smolensk-héraði í Rússlandi. Erindin sem kveðin eru undir dansinum í fyrra brotinu eru fengin úr Grímnismálum *Eddukvæða* (Gísli Sigurðsson 1999). En fyrst kemur hér lýsing keisarans á leik Gotanna, í enskri þýðingu William Tydeman:

> On the ninth day of the Twelve Days, when the rulers are sitting at dinner, the one which is also called the Harvest Dinner, those who are to perform the *gothikon* assemble by the two entrances to the great dining hall with the nineteen sofas, in the following manner: On the left side, where the Drungarius of the Fleet also stands, the Master of the Venetan section takes up his position together with a few ordinary members and the pandura-players with their instruments, and behind him the two Goths, wearing hides turned inside out and masks of different forms, holding shields in their left hands and sticks in the right.
>
> And after the conclusion of the ball-game, when the Ruler orders the Master of the Table to lead them in, then the Master of the Table at once gives a signal to the Master of the Theatre, and as he goes out himself, he orders them to go in. And as they run and strike the shields with the sticks they are holding, and carry out the striking, they say 'tul, tul.' And continuing to say this they approach the neighbourhood of the royal table until they are only a little distance from it, and from there the two groups join together and assume a ring formation, with one group enclosed in the ring, and the other group surrounding them on the outside. And they do this three times, after which they seperate, and take up positions in their usual places, the Venetans' group on the left, the Prasinans' group on the right, together with the ordinary members of both parties, and both groups sing the *gothicon*, i.e the following, while of course the pandura-players also perform

> their native melody: [Hér er sleppt illskiljanlegri orðarunu á grísku, latínu og mögulega germönsku máli].
>
> And when the masters then say to the Goths, '*ampaato*,' the Goths form a circle at the nod of the same masters, and as they beat the shields with the sticks and say 'tul, tul', they surround from within the masters of the two groups, and as they again draw apart and resume their usual places, and again the masters begin to say: [orðarunu sleppt]. And the Goths beat the sticks on the shields still saying 'tul, tul,' and run out, the group of the Venetans to the left, the group of the Prasinans to the right (Tydeman 2001, 623–25).

***Land næturinnar***
**XXIV. kafli – Sýrnes í Garðaríki, jól 902**

Mennirnir koma inn í veisluskálann í tveimur hópum, annar um anddyrið en hinn bakdyrnar, halda allir á skildi í vinstri hendi og slá hann með löngu stafpriki í þeirri hægri, kalla „jól, jól!" í samtaka kór. Það dunar í timburgólfinu undir fótum þeirra þegar þeir hlaupa fram eftir því og nánast alveg upp að háborðinu í syðri endanum þar sem jarlshjónin sitja með helstu foringjum liðsins og ambáttirnar allar í þyrpingu að baki þeim, staðnæmast síðan skyndilega, snúast á hæli og þramma til baka yfir í norðurendann, enn hrópandi, þar sem þeir skipa sér í tvær andstæðar fylkingar. Gígjuleikarar í hvoru horni byrja að slá hljóðfæri sín og fylkingarnar tvær fara fram og aftur yfir salargólfið, jafnt bil á milli hvers og eins væringjanna líkt og talna á taflborði, búnir þó sem hnefakonungar væru. Allir eru eins klæddir í bláar kápur og gyrtir belti með áberandi málmsylgju, ganga í takt hröðum skrefum og slá prikunum ýmist á eigin skjöld eða á prik þess sem næstur er, snúast á staðnum, stökkva upp allir í senn, stíga aftur, til hliðar og fram á ný. Þegar blásið er í lúðurhorn riðlast skipulegar raðirnar en koma snarlega saman aftur og mennirnir mynda tvo hringi, annan utan um hinn, sem síðan snúast ýmist sólarsinnis eða andsælis og leysast svo upp, tengjast saman aftur, dynurinn af stappi mannanna slíkur að ekki heyrist nema ómurinn af gígjuslættinum, og enn í þriðja sinn gliðna hringirnir og koma saman aftur, dimmröddуð hrópin kveða við í hvert sinn: „Jól, jól!"

Þorgerður hefur áður fylgst með áþekkum hringdansi um sólhvörfin og þó er langt um liðið, fyrsta veturinn þeirra eftir komuna með Auði ömmu frá Katanesi til Íslands, í Borgarholti hjá Birni austræna sem hefur þá að líkindum lært hann á árum sínum í kaupferðum hingað austur með föður Hræreks af Gotlandi. Þar hafði ömmubróðir hennar sjálfur leitt dansinn, klæddur í órakaða kýrhúð og halar festir á hana sem slógust til í hverri hreyfingu, með horn af geithafri á höfði. Andlitið var hulið dýrslegri grímu úr þæfðum ullarflóka líkt og konur bera við veturnáttablót þegar þær stíga inn í hlutverk dísa við árstíðaskiptin, og í axlasítt, gráspreng hárið voru festar hrafns- og rjúpufjaðrir á víxl. Allnokkrir af liðsmönnum hans og frjálsum húskörlum stigu með honum hringdansinn af mismikilli list, við undirleik Einars gellis í Selvík sem sló bæði strengi á gígju og blés í horn. Hér er aginn öllu meiri, hreyfingarnar samstilltar, vel æfðar. Tveir menn fara fyrir hvorri fylkingu og eru búnir álíka og Björn frændi hafði verið, einn hefur á kollinum hafurshorn sem snúa hvort í móti öðru en hinir bera horn af nauti og

hjartardýrum, fest á kórónulíkan höfuðbúnað úr beini, allir með fjaðrir í hári, smáar og stórar, geitskinn yfir öxlum. Grímurnar sem dylja andlitin eru hver með sínu móti, minna ýmist á ránfugl með krókboginn gogg eða vígtennt dýr: björn, úlf og stóran kött. „Þegar sólargangur er stystur og myrkrið allsráðandi treystum við böndin milli manna, dýra og fugla, og milli okkar heims á jörðu og hins sem djarfar fyrir á heiðum næturhimni undir rótum Yggdrasils“, hafði Björn sagt þegar hún spurði hann síðar hvers vegna hann hefði búist á þann veg sem hann gerði. „Allar verur náttúrunnar koma saman í jóladansinum og leggjast á eitt til þess að gullskjöldurinn taki að rísa hærra á himni og daginn að lengja að nýju.“

Enn er blásið í hornið og mennirnir slá sér nú í einn hring, króa þá fjóra grímubúnu af í honum miðjum, stíga hægan, taktfastan dans í kringum þá og bresta í söng.

*Eikþyrnir heitir hjörtur,*
*er stendur á höllu Herjaföðurs*
*og bítur af Læraðs limum;*
*en af hans hornum*
*drýpur í Hvergelmi,*
*þaðan eigu vötn öll vega.*

Stígandinn verður hraðari; Þorgerður finnur titringinn í gegnum skó og þykka sokka þegar mennirnir stappa niður fótum, sparkandi inn í hringinn í öðru hvoru skrefi á meðan þeir þylja upp heiti ánna sem renna vítt og breitt um Austurveginn og í Niflheim hinna dauðu.

*Slíð og Hríð,*
*Sylgur og Ylgur,*
*Víð og Ván,*
*Vönd og Ströndl,*
*Gjöll og Leiftur,*
*þær falla gumnum nær,*
*er falla til Heljar héðan.*

Síðustu orðin enduróma fyrir eyrum hennar, engu er líkara en þeim sé beint að henni einni. Allt hefur gengið til eins og hún hefur vonað, lánið loks með henni. Enn hefur hún ekki fundið svo mikið sem spennuboga um kviðinn sem í fyrri skiptin tvö hafði dagana næstu fyrir fæðingu verið tímanlegur undanfari þess að hríðarnar hæfust. Ullarstafurinn verður flaug hennar til Heljar, magnaður af galdri sem hún hyggst rista á hann með rúnum jafnskjótt og hún verður ein, fjarri forvitnum augum, og rjóða þær blóði sínu. Galdurinn sjálfur var fullortur á einu síðdegi við vefstaðinn, stuðlaður og fleygaður kenningu sem engin leið er fyrir nokkurn að ráða í; varð til líkt og af sjálfu sér á meðan hún dró ívafið undir og yfir uppistöðuþræðina og jafnaði þá með hrælnum. Aflangt áhaldið fer vel í hendi, skorið úr birki og var einhvern tímann ljósara en nú, og óvenju vandað. Á breiðari endann er skorið drekahöfuð með gapandi hvoft og klofna tungu,

örsmá eftirmynd af ógnandi stafnmynd á skipi sem siglir í hernað. Þótt flestir viti að fránn er annað heiti fyrir dreka er ólíklegt að nokkur átti sig á dýpri merkingu og reginafli orðanna sem hún hyggst rista á ullarstafinn: *hræls frán man á.* Drekinn sá er hennar eigin hugur sem mun standast allar ógnir þegar hún fer á milli heima í nótt. Næsta vísuorð magnar í senn stafinn sjálfan og kjark hennar til gandreiðarinnar: *grátt fimbulsinni flaug á.*

Og fleira hefur hún til Heljarfararinnar, fundið í grasabúri Járngerðar baka til í dyngjunni. Fyrir seiðferðina í Ási hafði Finna smurt brjóst hennar með bjarnarfeiti sem ásamt öðru var blandin steyttum fræjum af bolmurt, sem hún kvað sérlega góða í þessu skyni og Þorgerður hafði því laumast í búrið upp á von og óvon svo lítið bar á. Að vísu hafði henni reynst ógerningur að átta sig með öryggi á hvaða þurrkuðu jurtir hinar ýmsu leirkrúsir og baukar geymdu, engin þeirra var þó bolmurt því sterkur þefurinn af henni er Þorgerði enn í fersku minni. Sér til ánægju hafði hún hins vegar komið auga á vænan vönd af mistilteini sem enn hékk á þurrkránni ofan við vinnubekk húsfreyjunnar, laufið skrælnað og inn á milli klasar af gulnuðum og skorpnum berjum, vísast úr síðustu grasaferð áður en byrjaði að snjóa. Máttugri jurt en mistilteinn finnst ekki til Heljarfarar, allt frá þeim degi að Höður hinn blindi skaut honum að Baldri hvíta og varð honum þannig að bana fyrir lævísi Loka Laufeyjarsonar. Engin önnur planta heldur áfram að vaxa og bera ávöxt þótt vetri og það er ekki eina furðan því þessi runni finnst aldrei á jörðu heldur skýtur hann ávallt rótum hátt uppi í öðrum trjám. Berin að hausti eru hvít og hálfgagnsæ, full af kvoðukenndum safa sem klístrast á milli fingra séu þau sprengd. Og þótt Frigg hafi álitið mistilteininn of ungan til að krefja eiðs og valda syni sínum skaða þá er seyði af honum, ekki síst hafi maður þurrkuð berin mulin út í, svo göróttur drykkur að gæta verður ýtrustu varkárni eigi hann ekki að valda meini. Lófafylli af laufi fór í svuntuvasann og klasi með níu berjum sem hún steytti í mortélinu í eldaskálanum. Fyrir þremur dögum setti hún hvort tveggja í sjóðheitt vatn og bætti út í hunangsdropa; miðað við lyktina sem steig upp verður bragðið samt áreiðanlega rammt. Krúsin með seyðinu undir loki bíður á hillu í dyngjunni, hulin sjónum á bak við dulustaflann.

Þegar hún síðan bauðst til að hyggja að eldinum í dyngjunni í kvöld og gista þar einsömul yfir nóttina jánkaði Ilka án athugasemda. Ambáttirnar skiptast á um það verk að fela eldinn í stónni og blása í glæðurnar að morgni en Þorgerður hefur verið undanþegin því þegar jarlinn er í Sýrnesi til þess að vera honum tiltæk jafnt að nóttu sem degi. Hverfandi líkur eru hins vegar á að hann kalli eftir henni núna. Ólíkt því sem áður var hefur Hrærekur síðustu tvær vikurnar látið sem hún sé ekki til.

„Baba Jaga hefur náð honum til sín aftur eftir kjaftshöggið“, hafði dóttir hans sagt í dálítið meinfýsnum tóni. „Hún kann margt fyrir sér; þú mátt kallast heppin að hún hefur látið eiga sig að gera þér sendingu fyrir eftirlætið sem faðir minn hefur haft á þér mánuðum saman. Þær hafa sumar orðið illa veikar af eitruðum mat, fyrri frillur hans, eins og hann fullvel veit; ekki ástæðulaust að hann fól mér að gá að því hvað þú etur.“

Eins gott líka að enginn komi að henni og ávarpi með nafni eftir að hún er lögð af stað í seiðferðina því slíkt gæti valdið því að henni hlekktist illilega á og hugurinn ratаði ekki úr undirheimum og til baka í sinn heimham. „Sá eineygði draugadróttinn á sér grátt gaman sem er að leiða hamhleypur á villigötur“, hafði Finna sagt henni. „Til þess þarf

Óðinn samt að þekkja nafn þitt og því má enginn láta sér það um munn fara fyrr en þú snýrð til baka.“

Allt er því til reiðu og að óbreyttu hefði hún nú átt að sitja ein í næði í dyngjunni, með ullarstafinn og mathníf sinn í hönd, vel hvesstan, stúlkurnar farnar til hvílu í kvennaskemmunni. En þá höfðu þær allar fyrir stundu verið kallaðar inn í veisluskála væringjanna, Þorgerður sem aðrar, til að fylgjast með jóladansinum, ánauðugar konurnar sem aldrei er hleypt inn í það mikla hús nema til þess eins að þjóna mönnunum við blót- og drykkjuveislur. Hver og ein einasta, hafði Ilka sagt óðamála, til þess að álíka jafnt sé skipað beggja vegna í skálanum, konurnar norðan megin til mótvægis við karlana í syðri endanum. Því um sólstöður má hvergi halla á neitt, jafnvægi skal tryggt í einu og öllu á meðan heimarnir standa opnir, ella kann illa að fara. Það er því talsverð þröng í skálanum og loftið er orðið þungt því litlir ljórarnir eru hafðir lokaðir í frostkuldanum. Við bætist svitaþefur af mönnunum sem enn stíga dansinn af miklum móð, þeir hyrndu ýmist innan hringsins eða hlaupandi utan með honum, ávallt í öfuga átt við félaga sína, nú komna í kvæðasöngnum að hestunum sem draga kerru sólar upp á himininn.

*Árvakur og Alsviður,*
*þeir skulu upp héðan*
*svangir sól draga.*
*En und þeirra bógum*
*fálu blíð regin,*
*æsir, ísarnkol.*

Þorgerði er orðið ómótt. Hún svipast í kringum sig eftir Ilku en kemur hvergi auga á hana og kannski ekki að undra, svo lágvaxin sem stúlkan er. Henni ætti svo sem að vera óhætt að láta sig hverfa án leyfis. Varla skiptir nokkru máli þótt ein kona af svo mörgum yfirgefi skálann; henni er lífsins ómögulegt að vera hér andartakinu lengur. Ambáttirnar horfa allar sem ein á dansinn, engin þeirra ávarpar né gefur Þorgerði auga þegar hún mjakar sér í gegnum þröngina, ekki einu sinni þótt hún þurfi að stjaka við sumum til þess að komast framhjá, mikil um sig sem hún er. Það er ekki fyrr en hún hefur náð út úr þyrpingunni og að bakdyrum skálans að óvænt er tekið í öxl hennar.

„Hvert ætlar þú?“ Hvöss karlmannsrödd.

Hún lítur snöggt við og horfir í dimmbrún augu Kriosar. „Mér er svo þungt fyrir brjósti, ég verð að komast út fyrir.“ Og án þess að hún þurfi að gera sér nokkuð upp kemur magnleysi yfir hana í sömu svipan, hnén gefa eftir og hún fálmar út í loftið, svartir dílar eru fyrir augunum.

Geldingurinn grípur undir handlegg hennar og nær að forða henni frá falli. „Komdu þá.“ Hann opnar og styður hana út, lætur hana setjast í stóran skafl við vegginn þar sem mokað hefur verið frá dyrunum. Hrollkalt er úti en til allrar hamingju stilla og hún hefur þykkan röggvarfeldinn yfir sér, innanundir klædd slitnum en sæmilega hlýjum vaðmálsserk sem orðinn er strengdur yfir stóran kviðinn. Himinninn er heiður og stjörnubjartur en hvergi sést til tunglsins, blóðnætur jólamánans hafnar. Enn logar í

kyndli sem festur er á voldugan þrífót úr járni rétt hjá og varpar gullinni birtu á snjóinn, vísast komið þar fyrir til þess að lýsa væringjunum leið þegar þeir þustu bakdyramegin inn í veisluskálann.

**Síðar sama kvöld – XXVIII. kafli**

Krios festir sjónir sínar á væringjunum tveimur sem dansa fram og aftur á gólfinu framan við eldstæðið undir hornablæstri, hrópum og trumbuslætti félaga sinna sem standa á báðar hendur. Logarnir í þriggja faðma löngum furubolnum varpa skuggum þeirra hátt upp á norðurvegg veisluskálans, líkt og þar takist samtímis á vættir af öðrum heimi. Báðir eru mennirnir með grímu úr ullarflóka fyrir andliti og klæddir í gæruskinn en annar hefur ullina að sér og búið er að binda grænar grenigreinar á hann hvar sem því verður við komið, um arma hans og fótleggi, brjóst og bak, svo hann minnir einna helst á dansandi tré, skreyttur að auki litlum málmbjöllum sem klingja í hverju spori. Hann er kvikur á fæti þrátt fyrir trjábúninginn, veifar fimlega í kringum sig löngum staf og leggur honum aftur og aftur að mótherjanum, sem er mun digrari vexti og svifaseinni. Sá hefur ullina hið ytra og að auki fjölda skinna af íkornum og refum hangandi niður af belti um mittið þannig að skottin slást um fætur hans. Á höfði ber maðurinn eins konar kórónu af geit- og hreindýrshornum og í hendi heljarinnar lurk sem hann sveiflar í dansinum og skellir af og til í gólfið svo að dynur í því.

Krios hefur nógu oft horft á þennan einkennilega sjónleik til að vita hverjir eigast hér við. Þann greniklædda kalla Rúsar goðið Jólni og kenna sólhvarfahátíð sína við hann, segja hann hinn sama og hrafnaguðinn Óðin, en hinn er vetrargyðjan Grýla sem ætíð er á endanum hrakin yfir í norðurenda skálans og þaðan um opna gátt út í náttmyrkrið. Goðmögnin takast á um gang sólarinnar, gyðja frosts og myrkurs verður að láta undan síga eigi sól að rísa aftur á himni og gróðurinn að lifna við að vori.

Leikurinn er ekki með öllu ólíkur látbragði sem fram fer á sama árstíma á torgum suður í borg Konstantíns við Bosporussund og Krios þekkir. Þau sem þar eigast við grímuklædd eru hinn alsjáandi sólguð Helios og Hekate, þríein gyðja vegamóta, myrkurs og visku, sem flæmd er niður í undirheima. Þar, eins og hér, er slegið á hljóðfæri og þótt búningarnir séu ólíkt léttari og litríkari þá eru þeir einnig skreyttir bjöllum til að fæla á brott illar vættir sem leita færis um að komast að mönnum þegar hulan á milli heima sviptist frá um sólstöður. Þó er það ávallt kona en ekki karl sem leikur gyðjuna, oftast aldurhnigin, og hefur snáka með sér í dansinn, ekki aðeins sem armbönd og hálsfestar heldur einnig lifandi orma svo áhorfendum er eins gott að halda sig í hæfilegri fjarlægð. Honum verður ósjálfrátt hugsað til snákagyðju Rúsa í Hólmanum helga og sendiferð sinni í flæðimýrarnar norðan við jarlsgarðinn eftir eiturormi til þess að fela í rekkju kaupmannshjónanna. Eftir að Járngerður hafði lýst útliti snáksins sem hann átti að finna og hvernig taka skyldi fingrum aftan við haus kvikindisins til að forðast bit hafði hún þulið yfir honum verndargaldur. Hún stóð svo nálægt á meðan að Krios fann hitann af andardrætti hennar á andliti sínu, ilminn líka af smyrslinu sem hún bar á hörund sitt til verndar gegn brennandi sumarsólinni. Ótti hans við að verða bitinn varð að engu og slíkur var kraftur þulunnar að snákarnir í fenjunum

skriðu undan svo hratt sem þeir máttu jafnótt og þeir urðu hans varir og hann þurfti að beita ýtrustu varfærni til að komast nógu nálægt höggorminum sem hún hafði óskað eftir, gullinmynstruðum og gljáandi *fídi* sem hvæsti illskulega þegar Krios greip hann eldsnöggt upp og lokaði ofan í tágakörfunni.

Járngerður hafði verið hæstánægð með verk hans. Af henni skein velþóknun þótt hún hefði ekki um það mörg orð, strauk aðeins hendi hlýlega yfir handlegg hans um leið og hún tók við körfunni og þakkaði honum fyrir. En atvikið í kvennaskálanum nýverið hefur breytt andrúmsloftinu á milli þeirra. Líkast því sem Járngerði finnist Krios hafa svikið sig. En hver er hans sök önnur en að hafa verið ásjáandi þegar Þorgerður greiddi henni hnefahöggið eftir að hafa verið slegin með blautum sokkunum – og umvöndun Hræreks í kjölfarið? Þyki henni sem hún hafi verið auðmýkt á Krios að minnsta kosti enga hlutdeild í því. Og því lengur sem hann íhugar það því skýrar sér hann að húsfreyjan átti ávíturnar fyllilega skilið. Þótt gremjan í garð eftirlætisfrillunnar sé skiljanleg gekk hún heldur langt í framkomu sinni við hana; konan komin að falli og þunglamaleg eftir því, erfitt um vik fyrir hana að krjúpa við fætur húsfreyjunnar til að draga af henni.

Skyldi Þorgerði annars vera óhætt í dyngjunni svona á sig kominni, í nótt af öllum nóttum þegar illir andar eru á kreiki og demónarnir sem Rúsar kalla álfa smjúga um gáttir í leit að nýkviknuðu lífi? Handan við skil heimanna er tíminn ekki til, hefur Járngerður sagt honum; það er þess vegna sem dauðir geta séð bæði fram á við sem aftur til fortíðar og fært skyggnu fólki fréttir jafnt af því sem gerðist fyrir ævalöngu sem óorðnum atburðum. En sá hængur er á að án tímans geta annars heims vættir ekki sjálfar skapað nýtt líf, ófrjóar sem geldneyti og ófærar um að geta eða ala af sér afkvæmi. Og því er það að þær sækja sífellt í mannheima í leit að fylfullum hryssum eða klaufdýrum komnum að burði og þó helst af öllu að konum með barni, sitja þá um að ná ungviðinu á sitt vald og hafa með sér yfir í sína veröld, skilja eftir líflausa hami ellegar vanskapninga af djöflakyni. Krios snertir Andreasarkrossinn um háls sér og snýr fáguðu beininu milli fingra, sendir dýrlingnum hljóða bæn fyrir heill ambáttarinnar. Hún hefur víst þolað nóga harma, konan sú, þó hún missi ekki barnið í hendur demóna. En ákallið dugir ekki til; áhyggja hans vex í stað þess að sjatna. Og nýrri hugsun slær niður. Þótt stutt sé yfir í dyngjuna gæti hún hafa fengið aðsvif aftur og hnigið niður í skafl! Kuldinn er fljótur að setjast um hjarta hreyfingarlausrar manneskju og læsa í það klónum. Margir væringjanna eru með frostbitna fingur og tær og nógu oft hefur hann séð húsfreyjuna reyna að koma lífi í menn sem hafa farið sauðdrukknir í brunagaddi um tröðina á milli skálanna og sofnað áfengisdauða á miðri leið. Fæstir hafa vaknað aftur í þessum heimi, jafnvel þótt þeir hafi fundist næsta fljótt.

Krios sleppir hálsmeninu og réttir úr sér. Komi eitthvað fyrir Þorgerði í nótt er það hans sök, hann sá hversu völt hún var á fótum fyrr í kvöld. Og hversu illa myndu jarlshjónin reiðast ef hún frysi í hel og þau vissu að hann hefði látið undir höfuð leggjast að fylgja henni yfir í dyngjuna, svona vankaðri? Eins víst að Járngerður kæmist að því með skyggnigáfu sinni. Og þótt svo færi ekki og engan grunaði neitt myndi hann samt þurfa að lifa með þeirri vitneskju sjálfur að hafa óbeint orðið valdur að dauða móður og barns. Nei, það skal aldrei verða.

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# SCIENTIFIC SOCIETIES AND THE FORMATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: THE CASE OF PETER CHRISTEN ASBJØRNSEN AND HIS HONOURABLE MEMBERSHIPS

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The publication of *Deutsche Sagen* by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in two volumes in 1816 and 1818 created what Terry Gunnell characterises as no less than a "Romantic Nationalistic cultural tsunami" in nineteenth-century Northern Europe (Gunnell 2022b, 4). The result of this tsunami was a common project among scholars and the populace alike in collecting, documenting, and publishing of what was conceived as national identities and spirits as a means for establishing national cultures (see i.e., Gunnell 2010; 2012; 2022a; Amundsen 2012; Foldvik et al. 2023). The end products of these national movements were, as Terry Gunnell (2012, 303) points out, not only a corpus of key 'national' collections of stories and histories, but also key cultural institutions such as museums, galleries, and theatres, all with 'national' prefix attached to them. Perhaps a more unintended result of the tsunami and its methodological developments was how it in particular contributed to the development of the discipline of folklore studies in Northern Europe. The National Romantic movement coincided with the nineteenth-century emergence of a scientific disciplinary specialisation that academia had not seen before which systematised the scientific communities socially into units of structure, formally as part of new disciplinary educations, and professionally as designated disciplinary scientists filled the roles in education and research.

One of the central actors in the national romantic movement in Norway at this time, and one of the major contributors to the publishing of folk traditions during several decades of the nineteenth century was Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812–1885). In biographies and descriptions of his life and scientific work and achievements, his

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folklore collecting, categorising of folklore material, and publishing of Norwegian wonder tales and legends receive the most attention (see i.e., Hansen 1932; Bø 1997; Hult 2003). These studies place him in the midst of nineteenth-century history of folklore collecting, nation-building and the development of folklore as a scientific discipline both nationally and internationally (see also Amundsen 2013). Asbjørnsen's contributions to collecting principles, interpretive methods, aesthetic achievements in narrating the material he collected, and his impressive list of folkloristic publications underscore that he very much deserves the central position he has been given. The fact remains, however, that Asbjørnsen's service to the nineteenth-century knowledge-making and science development extended that of folklore and humanistic disciplines and included the development of natural sciences as well, comprising works within marine zoology, botany, forestry, nutrition, and national economy. He did, to put it bluntly, so much more than folklore collecting and this current study is an attempt to acknowledge that.

Understanding the development of folklore as a discipline in the nineteenth century requires recognising the broader scientific context from which it was a part. Furthermore, understanding Asbjørnsen's contribution to it demands a closer look at the breadth of scientific practices, achievements, and results that he produced – not only those belonging to the emerging folkloristic discipline. One feature of Asbjørnsen's achievements that has not previously been recognised in full is the fact that through his career he became the honourable member of no less than fourteen scientific societies, societies established all over Europe for the advancement and circulation of knowledge in an increasingly complex scientific environment of the nineteenth century. This article aims to understand both Asbjørnsen as a scientific conduit of the nineteenth century and the role scientific societies played during a time of great scientific development and change. The key sources used in this study are the diplomas, grant letters, and other correspondences between Asbjørnsen and members of scientific societies at the time, sources that are part of the Norwegian Folklore Archive in Oslo (NFS). These sources will contribute to highlighting Asbjørnsen as a specific *knowledge actor* and the scientific societies as *institutions of knowledge* that together made significant contributions to the *circulation of knowledge* in the nineteenth century.

**Scientific Societies and Knowledge Actors**

Italy was home to what has been recognised as the earliest European scientific societies, namely the *Accademia Secretorum Naturae* led by the famous sixteenth-century scientist Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615) in Naples and *The Accademia dei Lincei* (1600–1630) formed in Rome by Duke Fredrigo Cesi (1585–1630) (Ornstein 1928, 73–74). The *Accademia del Cimento*, formed by Grand Duke Ferdinand II (1610–1670) and Prince Leopold (1617–1675), two brothers of the influential Medici family, was an offspring of the former two, established formally in 1657. Advocating the role of experiments in the advancements of knowledge these early consortiums sought a community of experts like themselves that could sanction and support the scientific investigations that were being conducted and support the publication of the scientific results. These small and

private societies served as important examples for later scientific groups and for the establishment of formal scientific societies, from which the Royal Society of London was formally founded in 1660 and the *Academie des Sciences* established by Louis XIV in Paris in 1666 are regarded as the two most influential ones.

Following from the early foundations of scientific societies in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century saw a spread of societies throughout Europe leaving nearly every capital with its own scientific society as well as in many of the smaller provinces. Peter Burke suggests that the start of the century saw a shift in view of knowledge from 'curiosity' to 'research,' spurring an awareness of systematic, useful and co-operative knowledge-making that motivated the growth of organisations and institutions that could support research (Burke 2000, 46). Although the Norwegian capital did not see its first scientific society until *Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi* (The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters) was founded in 1857, Norway did get its first scientific society in the city of Trondheim in 1760 when bishop Johan Ernst Gunnerus (1718–1773) established *Det Trondhjemske Selskab* together with Peter Fredrik Suhm (1728–1798) and Gerhard Schøning (1722–1780). From 1767 it was called *Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab* (The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters; DKNVS). The society in Trondheim was motivated by the want for "a space for doing, disseminating and legitimising science in the broad sense of Wissenschaften" (Andersen et al. 2009, 4). As a society of the European Enlightenment, it shared common ideas with other societies while they at the same time were marked by their geographical location and influenced by local political and cultural situations and conditions (Eliassen 2009, ix–xv).

Fig. 1. Diploma from *Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab*, received 6 May 1861. Courtesy of the Norwegian Folklore Archive.

The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters was also the only scientific society (out of two) in Norway to welcome Peter Christen Asbjørnsen as one of its members in 1861. By that time, the scientific societies in Europe had met with developments as well as various challenges. Entering the nineteenth century, scholars across disciplines had established an interest in *description* be it social, cultural, economic, and geographical but it was especially apparent in the case of natural history. Compilations of lists and cataloguing including technical descriptions and detailed observations followed the descriptive practices, often with works making their intentions explicit with titles like "Topographical Descriptions of…" (Burke 2012, 69–73). The knowledge regime of previous centuries was put under pressure in this century with natural sciences and technology making stronger claims with the recognition of new and alternative knowledge putting emphasis on "the knowing how as well as knowing that" (Burke 2012, 256). It was a recognition of alternative sources, places, and actors for knowledge, and it is in this century that laboratories and experimentation gained a solid foothold. At the beginning of the century, the unstable political situation on the continent, with the Napoleonic wars, threatened both the existence of scientific societies and of their wider correspondences and dissemination of science across national borders. Furthermore, with the increasing specialisation and emergence of new scientific disciplines, the need for smaller and more specialised scientific groups, societies, and journals puts pressure on the multidisciplinary and broad scientific communities like those facilitated by the larger science societies. By the time Asbjørnsen had established himself both within the natural sciences and the humanities and the invitations to join one international scientific society followed after the other, the societies had accommodated the changing scientific landscape of the late nineteenth century.

First and foremost, scientific societies were part of a conglomerate of different institutions and communities promoting knowledge production and dissemination in the early modern period. Established within the framework of universities, by outsiders, by governments or by private groups of like-minded people, in opposition to or in accordance with other institutions, they shared their desire for the advancement of knowledge. As Peter Burke points out, "they provided opportunities for innovation – for new ideas, new approaches, new topics – and also for innovators, whether or not they were academically respectable" (Burke 2000, 44). Marie Boas Hall has pointed out that one of the various factors that made the grounds for the Royal Society in London's initial success was "its role in diffusing information throughout the world of learning, and its encouragement to Fellows and non-Fellows alike to communicate to the world the information they possessed and the discoveries they had made" (Hall 1975, 173). Evidently, the importance of letter writing for disseminating information and knowledge, discussing it, and evaluating it served as a fundamental scientific method in the first centuries of the scientific societies as it also did outside of them (Gibson 1982; Shapin 1994; Avramov 1999; Rusnock 1999; Grafton 2009). Examining the nineteenth-century networks and scientific discussions of which Asbjørnsen was a part, the tendency was the same, making those interested in contributing – not their academic

title – the main qualifying element for attending and the main tool for communicating letter-writing (Esborg 2022; Ohrvik 2022).

Viewing Asbjørnsen as a specific *knowledge actor* at the scientific scene of the nineteenth century acknowledges the socially anchored feature of knowledge. As Johan Östling and David Larsson Heidenland maintain, unfolding the social roles, arenas, networks, powers, and identities that may be connected to a knowledge actor make possible more multifaceted analyses of who, how, and why in writing the history of knowledge (Östling and Heidenland 2023, 21–26). Furthermore, studying institutions such as the scientific societies as *institutions of knowledge* fits particularly well with a continued social and cultural historical perspective enabling us to see connections between individuals, groups, and more formally organised social arenas, and their activities as specific forms of knowledge practices. Bringing these perspectives together we meet our sources with questions such as when Asbjørnsen received his membership in the different scientific societies, what kind of societies offered him membership, and how they contributed to his lifelong scientific practices.

**"to your benefit and honour"**

It has been suggested (cf. Stenseth et al. 2012) that Asbjørnsen gained limited international recognition in the scientific community during his lifetime. The main reason for his alleged insignificant position is explained by his lack of affiliation with a reputable research institution that could have provided him with the necessary authority. This impression, however, does not match the reality of Asbjørnsen's scientific practices and the honour and recognition he received. Considering his position and extensive network within both folklore and natural history, and the membership in European scientific societies that he was granted, a different perspective emerges. Focusing on awards, diplomas, and grant letters demonstrates the esteem he in fact enjoyed among contemporary researchers. It also demonstrates a productive scientist with a broad disciplinary orientation. Contrary to what has been suggested, Asbjørnsen came to be regarded as a respected scientist, reflected in his honorary memberships in more than fourteen leading European scientific societies, covering various disciplines from natural sciences to cultural history.

In 1848, at the age of 35, Asbjørnsen was given his first official award, the gold *Memoriæ Pignus* medal from King Oscar I of Norway and Sweden, recognising his contributions to national literature and folklore. While his work with *Norske Huldreeventyr* (1845) played a significant role in this recognition, his broader accomplishments as a folklore collector, author, and linguist were also acknowledged. Already in 1837, Asbjørnsen and his friend and companion Jørgen Moe (1813–1882) had embarked on their plan to publish a collection of Norwegian folktales based on the scientific principles established by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* 1812–1815. The intentions behind their literary and cultural project were publicly celebrated with the release of their first four-volume edition of Norwegian folktales in 1841–1844. A second, expanded scientific edition followed in 1852.

Asbjørnsen further published *Norske Folke- og Huldre-Eventyr* in 1845, with subsequent editions and international translations. From the late 1830s until his death in 1885, he travelled, collected, organised, edited, and published extensively on folktales and legends. It would not, however, come to a second invitation to membership within the humanistic disciplines before decades had passed. In the meantime, it was the European milieu within natural sciences whose attention was drawn to Asbjørnsen's scientific achievements.

Asbjørnsen became a zoologist by profession and worked with two of the most famous marine zoologists of his time, Michael Sars (1805–1869) and his son Georg Ossian Sars (1837–1927). With grants from the University in Christiania and the Royal Society of Science and Letters in Trondheim, he made a series of investigative voyages, collecting different specimens from the sea along the coast of Norway in the 1840s and 1850s. Some of his grants were for collecting folk traditions, others for marine zoology. In his holidays he wandered through the mountains and travelled to the most remote districts, collecting both *naturalia* and stories.

Having published extensively in natural history from the 1840s, both as popular science and as scientific discoveries, he had hoped to secure the position as a research fellow (stipendiary post) in zoology at the University in Christiania. He published six volumes on natural history (*Naturhistorie for ungdommen* 1838–1849), several popular science articles on various topics including dissemination of Carl von Linné's work (*Skillings-Magazin* 1840) and on the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin (*Budstikken* 1861). At the same time, he made remarkable scientific discoveries. The first discovery was in 1851 and involved a new sea pen (Pennatula). The results were published in *Fauna littoralis Norvegiæ* and also presented at the Scandinavian Natural Science conference (*Det skandinaviske naturforskermøtet*) in Christiania in 1856. His "Bidrag til Christianiafjordens Litoralfauna" (1853) published in *Nyt Magazin for Naturvidenskaberne* is still an important reference work in marine zoology. Yet, his most remarkable discovery was the sea star Brisinga, discovered at a depth of 380 meters in Hardangerfjorden using a tool that he himself invented, the bottom scraper. When he published his findings in 1856 in *Fauna littoralis Norvegiæ,* organic life was not thought to exist at great ocean depths. Despite his many discoveries, he was bypassed on the aforementioned research fellowship in zoology which ended up being given to a candidate in astronomy, proposed by Professor of Astronomy Christopher Hansteen (1784–1873). As a university discipline, zoology was established at the University in Christiania in 1852. Asbjørnsen never achieved a permanent university position in academia.

Between 1856–1858 Asbjørnsen was a student of forestry at the prestigious *Akademie für forstwirtschaft* in Tharand. Forestry was an important industry of great national economic significance at that time. However, higher education, specifically for forestry did not exist in Norway. Even in this field of knowledge, he had positioned himself by persistent publishing with works like *Om skovene og et ordnet skovbrug i Norge* published in 1855 and *Om myrdyrking* published in 1856. With a grant of 400 speciedaler from the Norwegian Ministry of the Interior (Departementet for det indre), he prepared for a new

career in forestry (forstmester) upon his return to Norway. According to his academic diploma issued on 21 June 1858, he completed the course of study with excellent grades in all subjects, including courses in chemistry, entomology and botany.[1]

The Ministry had invested thoroughly in Asbjørnsen's career by sending him off with an open letter of recommendation written by the Norwegian politician and civil servant Chr. Zetlitz Bretteville (1800–1871), Chief of the Ministry of the Interior. The letter of 2 May 1856 was written in French, stating "to whom it may concern" that Asbjørnsen was appointed by the Norwegian government in order to study forestry and execute field trips in the region before returning to his new position. To ensure that he receives adequate assistance and knowledge from learned men and men of the industry during his travels, Bretteville therefore "politely takes the liberty of explicitly recommending him."[2]

During his stay in Sachsen, Asbjørnsen not only sought education as a forester but also used it to acquire knowledge and experience in other disciplinary fields. He formed friendships and acquaintances with several prominent men in the fields of science and art by expanding his network of peers, which also influenced his later work (Larsen 1872, 16). He was also strategic in his networking when planning trips following his studies. This is evident in the response letter from nobleman Wedel Jarlsberg, where he fulfils Asbjørnsen's request by including letters of recommendation from prominent Europeans, "hoping that you will be able to undertake the forthcoming scientific journey to your benefit and pleasure" ("Jeg haaber saaledes at de med nytte og Behagelighed vil kunne foretage den instundende videskabelige Reise"). The extent to which he communicated with politicians, scientists, authors, artists, and peers through contact trips and letter writing is impressive, and the less than two thousand letters received by Asbjørnsen and stored in the National Library and Norwegian Folklore Archive evidently represent only a fraction of the letters he sent and received during his lifetime (Ohrvik 2022, 159–64).

After graduation from the Royal Saxon Academy of Forestry, he soon became honorary member of several scientific societies in this part of Europe: He is elected member of *Die gesellschaft für specielle, besonders vaterländische Naturgeschichte in Dresden*[3] on 10 May 1858 (The Society for Special, and in Particular Nationalistic Natural History) and *Thüringisch-Sächsische Gesellschaft für Erhaltung und Erforschung des vaterländischen Alterthums*[4] (The Saxon Society for the Preservation and Research of National Antiquities) on 6 September 1858.

In June of the same year, he also became an honorary member of *Der Verein für Deutsche Kultur-Geschichte*[5] in Weimar (The Society for German Cultural History), signed 22 June 1858 by philologist Dr Oskar Schade (1826–1906). *Die Naturforschende gesellschaft, zu Leipzig* (The Research Society for Natural Science) established in 1818, appoints him

[1] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomer, vitnemål.
[2] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomer, vitnemål.
[3] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomer 11.
[4] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomer 9.
[5] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomer 3.

as honorary member "ernennt hierdurch zu ihrem ehrenmitgliede" on 17 August 1858, and the diploma was signed by physicist Prof Dr Wilhelm Hankel (1814–1899) and physiologist Otto Funke (1828–1879) at the University of Leipzig.

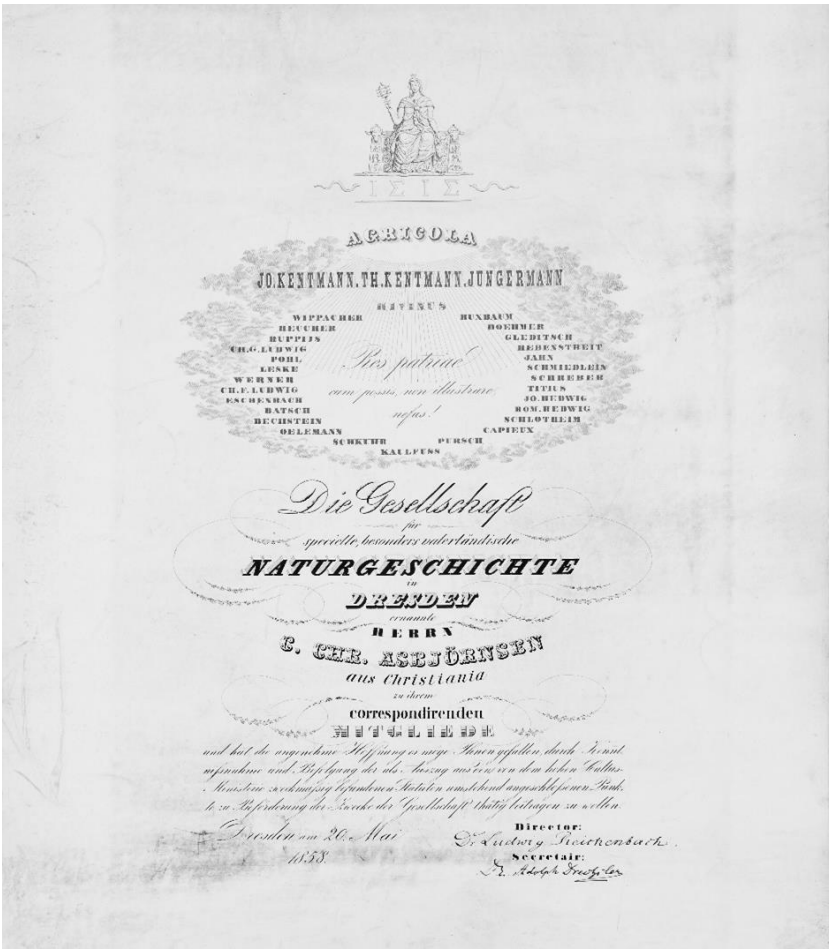


Fig. 2. Diploma from *Die Gesellschaft für specielle, besonders vaterländische Naturgeschichte* in Dresden, the first membership he received after his graduation in Tharand 10 May 1858. Courtesy of the Norwegian Folklore Archive.

At the end of that same year, he was appointed as a corresponding member at *Der naturwissenschaftliche verein in Hamburg* (The Natural Science Society), "[t]o give recognition to scientific merits and efforts in the broad field of natural history." The cover letter ends with "the pleasant expectation that it may please you to actively contribute to the promotion of your purposes." The Natural Science Society was founded on an initiative by scientifically interested citizens in 1837 and is thus one of the oldest scientific societies in Germany. Natural history was still viewed as a science close to the public domain, open and egalitarian at the same time as growing in reputation as an academic discipline throughout the eighteenth century and the first half

of the nineteenth century (Drouin and Bensaude-Vincent 2000). Five years after its establishment, the Natural Science Society built the first natural history museum in Hamburg which continues to exist today in the form of various natural science collections and exhibitions at the University of Hamburg. This society seems to fit his continuous work of furnishing museums with natural objects 'naturalier' and of making connections and exchanging collections on all his travels at home and abroad.

As documented, Asbjørnsen was awarded five memberships in German scientific societies after completing his studies in Tharandt. This coincides with the attainment of his formal degree and title. It is important to note that he had been actively publishing for nearly two decades by this point. Nevertheless, his completion of yet another academic degree, combined with his intense and strategic networking while residing in Germany, must have been decisive factors for his reputation and subsequent scientific memberships. The societies he became affiliated with encompass both natural and cultural sciences, demonstrating the international recognition he received from his interdisciplinary practices and scientific efforts. These societies showcase considerable diversity, ranging from those established by universities with close ties to museums to those formed by interested civilians. Furthermore, this review highlights the proliferation in the establishment of scientific societies in Germany throughout the nineteenth century. According to Bowler and Pickstone (2009), a close relationship was upheld between university-based scholars and the members of the many provincial and local naturalist associations that were founded all over the German-speaking world in the same period. However, the community of science professionals at this time was so small, "that the category of 'professionals' can hardly be much of use for historical analysis. Rather, it is within the amateurs that historians of science are increasingly coming to recognize categories that can more usefully be distinguished" (Bowler and Pickstone 2009, 18). As a knowledge actor of the nineteenth century, Asbjørnsen's role is both typical and essential in the formation of new disciplines and categories.

Two years later, in 1860, he was granted membership of *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuralta* (The Finnish Literary Society) established in 1831 in Helsinki (1860). The diploma announcing his membership was signed by Professor Elias Lønnrot (1802–1884). Lønnrot was a polymath of his time, and like Asbjørnsen in his broad field of interests and publications. While trained as a physician, he worked actively in fields like botany, poetry, linguistics, philosophy, philology, and folklore.

On 6 May 1861 he was appointed membership of the first Norwegian scientific society, the prestigious *Det Kongelige Norske Videnskabers Selskab* in Trondheim (The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences and Letters in Trondheim):

> Det kongelige norske videnskabers selskab bevidner herved at det den 30 April 1861 har udvalgt Hr Forstmester P.Chr. Asbjørnsen til at være Selskabets medlem dels for derved at tilkjendegi denne Mand det kongelige Norske Videnskabers-Selskabs Høiagtelse, dels for i ham at forbinde sig en gavlig Medarbeider til at opnaa Selskabets øiemed, Videnskabeligheds Oplysning og Videnskabeligheds fremme i Norge. Til Vitterlighed herom underskrives dette Diplom ifølge Statueternes §8 paa Selskabets höie Protectors Vegne og Selskabets Præses og

Vicepræses samt parapheres og dets Secretair og forsegles med dets store segl." Throndhjem 6 mai 1861, sign Sogneprest, ordfører Christian Petersen Præses. Carl Müller vicepræses.

The Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences hereby attests that on April 30, 1861, Mr. Chief Forester P. Chr. Asbjørnsen has been chosen as a member of the Society, partly to express the high esteem of the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences towards this individual, and partly to secure a valuable collaborator in achieving the Society's goals of promoting scientific knowledge and advancement in Norway. This diploma is signed in accordance with Article 8 of the Society's statutes, on behalf of the Society's esteemed protectors, president, vice-president, and secretary, and is sealed with the Society's official seal. Trondheim, May 6, 1861. Signed, Parish Priest, Chairman Christian Petersen, President. Carl Müller, Vice President.

He is defined as "a valuable collaborator" in "promoting scientific knowledge and advancement." And among the 17 new members presented in April 1861, Asbjørnsen is entitled "Forstmester, den kjente gjenforteller og utgiver av Norske Folkeventyr m.v" (Forester, the renowned narrator and publisher of Norwegian Folktales and more) (DKNVS Matrikkel 1760–1869). The society demonstrated a long-standing interest in Asbjørnsen's work, as evidenced by the correspondence exchanged between him and the society during a decade, between 1844 and 1854. Notably, the society actively supported his maritime research during the 1850s, effectively functioning as a research council in that capacity (Stubbhaug 2010, 152f).

Fig. 3. Diploma received from *Die kaiserlich königliche zoologsiche botanische Gesellschaft* in Wien, 7 October 1863. Courtesy of the Norwegian Folklore Archive.

Subsequently, Forester Asbjørnsen was designated as a member of *Die kaiserlich königliche zoologisch botanische Gesellschaft*, Wien (The Imperial Royal Zoological and Botanical Society in Vienna) in 1863. The Diploma is signed by the president of this society, the Austrian nobleman and politician Josef Fürst Colloredo-Mannsfeldt (1813–1895) and the Austrian naturalist Georg Ritter von Frauenfeld (1807–1873).

The society was established in 1851. In the yearbook, Asbjørnsen stands out among the *Auslandische mitglieden* (foreign members), as the singular representative from Christiania, Norway. The cover letter accompanying the diploma is signed von Frauenfeldt on 29 September 1863, who in very polite terms "*Ehren wohlgeboren*" presents him with the diploma and asks for his portrait in return. The exchange of portraits – carte de visite – was an important aspect of networking throughout the nineteenth century (Ohrvik 2022). The citations and signatures provide valuable indications of those aspects of Asbjørnsen's work that were considered worthy of honour. We can only imagine what he thought about the fact that Charles Darwin joined the same society, long after he had received his membership, four years later. The following year, in 1864, von Frauenfeldt reappeared on the membership list of newly elected members of the Norwegian scientific society in Trondheim. It is likely that Asbjørnsen had a hand in this by nominating his Austrian peer as a return favour (DKNVS, Matrikkel 1760–1960).

Becoming a member of a society sometimes resulted in membership in others, or served as a means of authorising the new member. The latter was evident upon entry into the following two societies, both of which were well established in the eighteenth century: *Sociéte imperiale académique de Cherbourg* (The National Academic Society in Cherbourg) was a learned French society established in 1755 specifically interested in history and archaeology: "P. Chr Asbjørnsen Membre de la Societe Royale des Sciences de Norvege a Throndhjem a été nommé membre Correspondant dans la Seance du 7 Mai 1872 à Cherbourg, ce 8 mai 1872." The cover letter[6] entitles him by his membership in the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters and that he is given the title *membre correspondant* due to his achievements: "Veuillez bien, monsieur, agréer l´hommage de la haute consideration avec laquelle jái l´honneur d'étre votre trés humble et obéissant serviteur et confrère." The diploma is signed in Cherbourg on 7 May 1872 by directeur Digard de Lousta (1813–1879), a French historian and poet. The following year, the Swedish *Kungliga Vetenskaps och Witterhets samhället* in Gothenburg (The Royal Society of Arts and Sciences) awarded him membership. This was an interdisciplinary society of science established in 1778, where Asbjørnsen was appointed as 'Norwegian member' ("har til Norsk ledamot kallat Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, Göteborg 7. mai 1873"). The annual yearbook shows the esteemed company of fourteen other prominent Norwegian members at the time, among them Christopher Hansteen (1784–1873), Christian Boeck (1798–1877); Andreas Faye (1802–1869) Ludvig Daa (1809–1877), Johan Fritzner Heiberg (1805–1883), Andreas Munch (1811–1884) and Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807–1873).

Already the next year, on 14 May 1873, Asbjørnsen became an honorary member of the *Isis Gesellschaft für naturkunde in Dresden* (Isis Society for the Promotion of Natural

[6] NFS Asbjørnsens Diplomsamling.

History in Dresden). The Isis Society focused on regional natural history and valued collections and excursions as educational tools. The society was closely linked to liberal political currents of the time. Compared to previous generations of natural scientists (university professors or elite), ISIS Society now also includes pharmacists, artisans, teachers, and others from the middle class. According to Denise Phillips (2003), this social diversity contributed to more accessible knowledge about nature. For nineteenth-century regional naturalists, "aesthetic enjoyment of local landscapes was rooted in careful scientific practice" (2003, 59). This must have been appealing to the new member Asbjørnsen. Dresden's most prominent naturalist, Dr Ludwig Reichenbach (1793–1879), the medical academy's professor of natural history, director of Dresden Natural History Museum and the new botanical garden, also gave a great deal of attention to broader circles of natural history practitioners. Furthermore, he serves as an intriguing liaison connecting the different Dresden societies, where Asbjørnsen was included later on.

*Svenska Fornsskrift-Sällskapet* in Stockholm, elects Chief Forester Asbjørnsen as member 1 September 1874: "I den säkra öfvertygelse, att Sällskapets ändemål skall af honom med värma omfattas och befordras" ('In the firm conviction that he will warmly embrace and promote the goals of the Society'). The diploma is signed by librarian and translator Johan Erik Rydquist (1800–1877) and writer and linguist Fredrik A. Dahlgren (1816–1895). Established in 1843, the society's purpose was to promote research and knowledge and advance the societal benefits of scientific advancements. Although historians have emphasised the professionalisation of science in this period - there is at the same time still a concurrent emphasis on a diverse community of researchers, a point relevant for most societies under review in this article (Phillips 2003, 44).

In June 1876, he became an honorary member of *British Scandinavian Society*, founded in 1875 with the aim to stimulate interest in the "literature, history and science" of the Scandinavian countries. According to the yearbook he kept, honorary members could enjoy all the privileges of ordinary members, without any entrance fee. The cover letter is signed by committee member Edmund Gosse, a central figure in Asbjørnsen's network (see Rem 2002, 55–56). At its instigation, the society had thirteen honorary members. In addition to Asbjørnsen, we find widely acclaimed artists like the Danish H. C. Andersen (1805–1875), best remembered for his literary fairy tales, the famous Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), the painters J. C. Dahl (1788–1857) and Hans Gude (1825–1903), musician Ole Bull (1810–1880) and publisher Frederik Hegel (1817–1887). The publishing house Gyldendalske Boghandels Forlag played a significant role as a literary institution at the time. Its influence extended beyond publishing books, as it also organised literary events, supported literary societies, and contributed to the cultural discourse of the period. All of these individuals constitute part of Asbjørnsen's close network. Hans Gude was, to mention but one, one of Asbjørnsen's chosen artists in the artist's edition of *Huldreeventyrene* [Wondertales] that he published a few years later in 1879.

The journey came full circle, in a sense, when he, in November 1884, two months before he passed away, was appointed as an honorary member of the newly established

*Foreningen for norske dialekter og folketraditioner* (The association for Norwegian dialects and folk traditions):

> Her Forstmester P Chr Asbjørnsen. I levende erkjendelse af deres fortjenester af vort Folks Tro og Diktning har Foreningen for norske dialekter og folketraditioner ved sin stiftelse 2. april sistleden invalgt Dem som æresmedlem af sit Samfund. Foreningen beder Dem i Valget at se et Udryk for den varme Erkjentlighed, hvormed den omfatter Deres betydningsfulde Virken. Kristiania den 17 November 1884. For Bestyrelsen Formand Johan Fritzner
>
> In recognition of your contributions to our people's beliefs and poetry, the Association for Norwegian dialects and folk traditions has elected you as an honorary member upon its founding on April 2nd of last year. The Association asks that you see this appointment as an expression of the warm gratitude with which it embraces your significant work. Kristiania, 17 November 1884. For the Board, Chairman Johan Fritzner

The society was established in 1881, an event widely reported by newspapers, stating that "we" – unlike Sweden – have neglected the study of vernacular languages. In addition, the society will collect and preserve folklore (Moss Tilskuer 22.02.1881, 3; Morgenbladet 06.03.1881, 1). The founding of the society came as a result of a public call, signed by six influential men, among them Asbjørnsen himself. The rationale for such a society was explicitly expressed:

> Siden studiet af vore Dialekter og Folketraditioner for snart 50 aar tilbage grundlagdes i vort land, har disse forskninger været omfattede ved en stadig og voxende interesse. Antallet af dem, der sysler med indsamling og forberedende undersøgelse af materialet, er aar for aar steget; flere og flere Grene ere dragne ind under videnskabelig Behandling og har fundet Dyrkere; i de senere tider har enkelte Mænd helt kunnet vie dette Fag sit arbeide og sin kraft. Som følge af dette har dette slags studier lidt etter lidt formaaet at tiltrekke sig en almindeligere opmerksomhed. Erkjendelsen af deres videnskabelige og nationale betydning maa nu siges at være vaagnet til bevidst Liv hos den dannede Almenhed.
>
> Since the study of our dialects and folk traditions was established in our country almost 50 years ago, these research endeavours have been met with a consistent and growing interest. The number of individuals engaged in collecting and conducting preparatory investigations of the material has steadily increased year by year. More and more branches have come under scientific scrutiny and have found advocates. In recent times, certain individuals have been able to dedicate their work and energy entirely to this field. As a result, these types of studies have gradually managed to attract wider attention. Recognition of their scientific and national significance can now be said to have awakened conscious awareness among the educated public.

Already in the first year, 1881, the society managed to gather a community of 800 members. The society's first journal was divided into two sections, one focused on language and dialectology, represented by linguist and philologist Professor Johan Storm (1836–1920), the other on folklore, represented by Candidate Moltke Moe (1859–1913) (Morgenbladet 29.06.1885). This development reveals the emergence of institutions and disciplines within the humanities that were soon to come. In 1886

Moltke Moe was appointed the first Professor "i norsk Folkesprog med Forpliktelse til ogsaa at foredrage norsk Folketradition" – the first Nordic professor in folklore studies, in the field of research Asbjørnsen had initiated.

"*Laurbær er til for genier og ansjos*"– according to myth, this is supposedly an Asbjørnsen quote stemming from a Greek proverb. Whatever origin, the saying cautions against complacency, urging individuals to continue striving for success rather than relying solely on past achievements. Asbjørnsen exemplified this philosophy throughout his life. Without university affiliation, he never became a fully recognised member of academia. That said, he was not interested in any form of recognition. When he was awarded the *Decoration som* R*idder af Wasaordenen* via the Ministry of the Interior in Christiania, on behalf of the Swedish Ministry in Stockholm 28 August 1871, he declined. The Royal Order was given as a reward for merits in agriculture, mining, art, education or useful writings on these subjects. Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, Asbjørnsen declined it. According to Alfred Larsen, the first biographer of Asbjørnsen's life and work, Asbjørnsen was not willing to accept an award that he himself would have characterised as a "caricature-like commemoration of medieval chivalry." Larsen explains it as "the reason being, of course, that Asbjørnsen, in his writings, has in several places discussed and derided the order system, viewing contemporary chivalry as a farce and knighthoods not as signs of merit, but essentially as ceremonial uniforms and adornments for court and social life" (Alfred Larsen 1872, 22). Therefore, there was no sense of scholarly or scientific recognition associated with this award. Here, it was royalty, not peers, appointing him. It was neither to his benefit nor to his honour. *Laurels* aside, he continued his academic endeavours, among other things, by furnishing several European natural history museums with his collections of natural objects until his demise at approximately 73 years old in January 1885 (Aasvang 2022).

Asbjørnsen became a member of Norwegian, Swedish, Austrian, German and French scientific societies. Each society contributed to scientific discussions involving academies, universities, museums, private interest groups, noblemen and politicians, revealing different nineteenth-century formations of knowledge. The source material used in this study has, however, its limitations. Additional research that comprehensively considers the diverse range of scientific societies, their members, patrons, and their societal status is necessary. Our findings can, nonetheless, provide some indications of how the scientific societies contributed to the advancement of science, enabling Asbjørnsen to continue researching and writing about his interests with support from his peers.

A membership in *The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters* in 1857 might have been more wanted. After his sensational discovery of the sea star Brisinga in 1856, according to rumour, he was suggested as a member by his friend Sars for the newly established *The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters* in 1857. Amundsen (1957) refers to an enthusiastic letter from Sars to Asbjørnsen while in Tharandt about the promising newly established Academy of Science and Letters in Christiania. Several decades later, a series of newspaper articles were published, written by the *enfant terrible* geologist and politician Amund Helland (1846–1918) on the matter (c. *Mere om Kristiania*

*Videnskabsselskab*, Dagbladet no 134: 25.05.1883, 1). Helland used the fact that despite his fame, Asbjørnsen was never awarded membership at the academy in Christiania, to scorn the supposedly exclusive closed circles of the academy publicly, thus accusing them of protecting their own status. According to Helland, Asbjørnsen had not even been considered by the academy to avoid offending professor Laurits Esmark, manager at the Museum of Zoology, who apparently did not favour Asbjørnsen. They had a dispute about the nature of a crab. However, this Helland is the only source of this. Amundsen suggests that it might have been Asbjørnsen's "bohemian way of life" which could explain why he never became a member (Amundsen 1957, 208). Asbjørnsen never married and lived in the house of a single woman (Liestøl 1947, 248f).

There is no information available regarding his thoughts or opinions on these matters in any known sources. Neither are there any traces in Asbjørnsens collections about his sentiments toward the other societies he didn't become a member of. The protocols from *The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters* reveal nothing about either the proposal on membership or the reasoning. From how the awards appear in the archive today, however, we get a clear impression that Asbjørnsen had high regard for the awards and membership he actually received. He had arranged to have a 68 x 53 cm stiff leather binder made with the title "Diplomer fra forskjellige Selskaber" (Diplomas from various societies) engraved on its cover which could store and protect the diplomas. Furthermore, based on his own notes on the backside of some of them, he had made sure to order new copies of diplomas and awards that for some reason had been lost so that his collection was complete. When Asbjørnsen published a memorial text on his late friend, the widely acclaimed Professor Michael Sars in 1870, he made sure to present himself on the journal cover with the entire list of awards and memberships in scientific societies that Asbjørnsen had achieved (Asbjørnsen 1870).

**The Circulation of Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century**

In the nineteenth century, scientific societies played a crucial role in the advancement, dissemination, and circulation of knowledge across Europe, fostering both the emergence of new disciplines and the international exchange of ideas. This article highlights the significance of these societies through the lens of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, a specific knowledge actor, and his extensive involvement and recognition in various European scientific communities. Despite his primary renown as a folklorist, Asbjørnsen's contributions extended far beyond folklore, encompassing, among other fields, natural sciences, and forestry. His honorary memberships in over fourteen scientific societies across disciplines underscore his broad impact on knowledge production during this period. Asbjørnsen's career illustrates how scientific societies were specific institutions of knowledge that provided platforms for scholars to collaborate, share discoveries, books, and *naturalia*, and gain recognition outside formal academic institutions. These societies, often formed by people from various backgrounds and professions, were pivotal in legitimising and promoting scientific research, particularly in regions where formal academic structures were less established.

Asbjørnsen's inability to secure a permanent university position did not hinder his scientific achievements, as his work was widely acknowledged through these memberships and his extensive network of correspondences.

What, then, can be learned from the review of Asbjørnsen's diplomas and the glimpses into his engagement with some European scientific societies in the nineteenth century? We believe there is quite a lot. Academia today is increasingly recognised for its focus on interdisciplinarity, based on the assumption that complex problems or questions cannot be fully understood or solved within the confines of single academic fields. The argument is that interdisciplinary work, which breaks down traditional boundaries between disciplines and leverages the strengths of various fields, leads to a broader vision, more creative solutions and comprehensive outcomes to those societal challenges modern society faces, and the knowledge needs it fosters. In many respects, we can talk about a major turn in how we view and ultimately encourage future knowledge production. But which way are we turning if not – at least to a certain extent – backwards to a time resembling that of Asbjørnsen? The late nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century have been recognised by academic specialisation and the establishment of a vast number of disciplines and subdisciplines across all fields. Asbjørnsen and his peers in the nineteenth century were less constrained by disciplinary boundaries and, as a result, were more flexible, adaptable, and innovative when approaching different subjects. Insights into their intellectual motivations, curiosities, inquiries, and eventually their methods are thus highly relevant for us today.

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# I SKYGGEN AV PETER CHRISTEN ASBJØRNSEN: EN STUDIE AV NORSKE SAGNUTGIVELSER PÅ 1800-TALLET

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Terry Gunnell ledet for få år siden prosjektet «Grimm Ripples», der målet var å undersøke hvilken betydning brødrene Grimm hadde hatt for studiet av folketradisjon i Nord-Europa. De norske bidragene handlet om de to første sagnutgiverne, Andreas Faye (Baklid 2022) og Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (Esborg 2022; Ohrvik 2022). Det var et naturlig valg, også fordi de representerte to ulike måter å forstå og utgi sagn på, og de har blitt vurdert ulikt som sagnutgivere. Asbjørnsen har blitt stående som representant for det «folkelige norske», mens Faye har blitt sett som en litt hjelpeløs, unorsk embetsmann som ikke forsto hva han holdt på med. Disse vurderingene kan utfordres, og denne artikkelen forsøker å trekke opp noen andre perspektiver på norske sagnutgivelser på 1800-tallet.

Den som har bidratt sterkest til ettertidens vurderinger av Asbjørnsen og Faye, er Moltke Moe (1856–1913), Norges første professor i folkeminnevitenskap. I sitt stort anlagte epos om «det nationale gjennembrud og dets mænd», med undertittelen «P. Chr. Asbjørnsen – Jørgen Moe – Ivar Aasen», gjorde Moe et forsøk på å beskrive en mer enn hundreårig faglig og litterær prosess. I Moes tekst er hovedargumentet at innsamling og publisering av norsk folklore hadde fulgt en nasjonal, språklig og folkelig utvikling. For Moe var utviklingen av et norsk språk viktig, og derfor avsluttet han fremstillingen med språkforskeren Ivar Aasen (1813–1896), grunnleggeren av det som ble hetende landsmål eller nynorsk. Moe hevdet at utgivelse av norsk folketradisjon fikk en stadig mer folkelig og norsk språkform. At dette var en viktig faktor bak de politiske hendelsene som i 1905 gjorde Norge til en selvstendig stat, var en selvsagt undertekst.[1]

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[1] Publiseringen av teksten ble påbegynt i 1906–1907, men ble aldri fullført i Moes levetid, og den ble først trykt i sin helhet i bind III av *Moltke Moes samlede skrifter* (Moe 1927).

Utviklingen startet ifølge Moe med Andreas Fayes (1802–1869) utgivelse *Norske Sagn* fra 1833. Den fikk betydelig utbredelse, og kom i et nytt opplag i 1844 med tittelen *Norske Folkesagn*. Moe la vekt på at Faye ble kritisert av historikeren Peter Andreas Munch (1810–1863) for å være for dansk i språket og for preget av embetsmannskulturen til å være en dekkende presentasjon av sagnene. Moe ga samtidig Faye æren av å ha vært den første som utga slikt materiale i Norge, inspirert av Grimm-brødrenes *Deutsche Sagen* fra 1816–1818 (Grimm og Grimm, utg. 1816–1818) og Just Mathias Thieles (1795–1874) utgivelser av danske sagn (1818–1823).[2] Fayes bok «maa derfor siges virkelig at indlede et nyt tidsrum i vor litteratur – ikke ved sit eget værd, men som et varsel om det som skulde komme» (Moe 1927, 50). Og det som ifølge Moltke Moe skulle komme, var Peter Christen Asbjørnsens (1812–1885) og hans egen fars, Jørgen Moes (1813–1882), utgaver av norske eventyr og norske sagn. Dette perspektivet har blitt gjentatt av norske folklorister frem til i dag,[3] men en nærmere analyse vil vise at det ikke er dekkende. Moltke Moes perspektiv må nyanseres og til dels avvises.

Det er sagnutgivelsene som skal stå i sentrum for denne artikkelen, og dem var det Asbjørnsen som sto for. I 1845 og 1848 kom første utgave av hans *Norske Huldre-Eventyr og Folkesagn*, der sagn ble flettet inn i rammefortellinger om utgiverens vandringer i bygdene rundt hovedstaden Kristiania. Språket i denne første utgaven var dansk.

Moltke Moe gjorde sin egen far og Asbjørnsen, hvis universalarving han var, til sentrale nasjonale helter på 1800-tallet (Amundsen 1999). Et annet og viktigere spørsmål er om han hadde rett i sin skildring av hvordan innsamling og utgivelse av folkeminner utviklet seg i 1800-tallets Norge. Var det faktisk slik at modus, intensjon og stil definitivt ble satt gjennom Peter Christen Asbjørnsens sagnutgaver fra 1845–1848 og 1859–1866, eller fantes det også *andre gyldige standarder for sagnutgivelse i siste del av 1800-tallet?*

Et utgangspunkt er Andreas Fayes sagnutgave fra 1833/1844, og da særlig én dimensjon ved den. Faye fulgte sine forbilder Grimm og Thiele, ikke bare i metoden for innsamling av materialet, men også i måten han presenterte det på. Grimm hadde nummerert de 585 sagnene, de opplyste om kildene for det enkelte sagnet, om det enten var «Mündlich» og/eller hentet fra skriftlige kilder. Samlingen hadde også et lengre forord, der det ble gjort rede for hva et sagn var, for eksempel til forskjell fra eventyr og historie («wirkliche Geschichte»; Grimm og Grimm 1816, 1:I–XXVI [sitat VIII]). I andre utgave av sagnsamlingen (1843) inndelte Thiele materialet i fire hovedgrupper: historiske sagn, stedssagn, sagn om naturgjenstander og sagn om det overnaturlige.

I Fayes sagnutgave fra 1833 finner vi mye av det samme. Faye redegjorde tydelig for sine kilder. Det var eldre litteratur, sagn innsendt til ham fra ulikt hold og materiale han selv hadde nedtegnet etter muntlig fortelling. Sagnene fikk ikke numre, men ble fordelt tematisk i seks grupper: overnaturlige vesener, kjemper og konger, St. Olav, Svartedauden, historiske sagn og «forskjellige sagn». Andreas Faye ønsket å følge en standard for *vitenskapelig* publisering og utgivervirksomhet, med ordning av materialet, kildeangivelser og forklaringer. Her gikk han lenger enn både Grimm og Thiele. Den tematiske inndelingen hadde han ikke fra Grimm eller Thiele, men fra en samtale han

[2] Thiele 1843. Thiele utga allerede i 1817 et lite hefte, *Prøver af Danske Folkesagn* (Brødrene Thiele).

[3] Se referanser i konklusjonen.

hadde med den lærde Sjællands-biskopen Peter Erasmus Müller (1776–1834) i 1831 (Baklid 2022, 123).

Faye presenterte seg i sagnutgavene fra 1833 og 1844 som henholdsvis lærer (1833) og sogneprest (1845) og medlem av Videnskapsselskapet i Trondhjem. I innledningen beskrev Faye flere mulige bruksområder for det materialet han publiserte (Amundsen 2002, 26–59), men det var kanskje primært som historisk kildemateriale Faye så verdien av sagnene. At han i 1844 forsøkte å komme kritikerne i møte ved å endre tittelen på boken fra «Norske Sagn» til «Norske Folkesagn», betød ikke at han endret sin måte å utgi materialet på.

Peter Christen Asbjørnsens tilnærming til sagnmaterialet var annerledes. Hans samling av sagn fremstår ikke som et forsøk på vitenskapelig systematisering av materialet, men han forsøkte likevel å foreta visse akademiske grep. Han skapte et eget begrep – «Huldre-Eventyr» om sagn som handlet om møter med overnaturlige vesener. I innledningen til den første utgaven fra 1845 skrev Asbjørnsen at han ville «lade Folket selv optræde fortællende» (Asbjørnsen 1845, IV), men han tilføyde et glossarium over «provincielle Ord og Talemaader» (Asbjørnsen 1848, 245–54). Å innlemme folkelige ord og uttrykk var slett ikke selvsagt i 1840-årene.

Med den litterære formen Asbjørnsen valgte – å plassere seg selv inn i rammefortellingene og flette inn enkelte dialektale ord og uttrykk – forsøkte han å plassere sagnene tettere på norsk natur og å gi fortellerne litterær individualitet. Etter hvert fikk Asbjørnsen også rykte for å være «folkelig», noe som lå langt unna presten og embetsmannen Andreas Fayes idealer. I den reviderte sagnutgaven fra 1859 gikk Asbjørnsen lenger i å legge inn «norske» ord og uttrykk, selv om han ikke hadde maktet å justere teksten «efter de Forestillinger, jeg nu har om norsk Stil» (Asbjørnsen 1859, IX). Denne justeringen fortsatte gjennom de stadig nye utgavene av boken. Det var denne språklige og kulturelle endringsprosessen som Moltke Moe løftet frem, støttet og selv videreførte i posthume utgaver av Asbjørnsens tekster.

Ikke minst under Moltke Moes redaktørskap ble Asbjørnsens sagnutgave et instrument for «fornorskning» av språket. Det tjente den språkpolitikken Moe selv argumenterte for. Det han derimot ikke skrev noe om, var at det fantes sagnutgivelser som fulgte andre prinsipper og hadde andre formål enn utviklingen av et nytt norsk skriftspråk. Det er noen av disse utgivelsene som skal analyseres i det følgende.

**Anders Evensen Vang**

Anders Evensen Vang (1795–1877) – eller som han etter hvert skrev seg: Andris Eivindsson Vang – utga allerede i 1850 en samling på 78 sider med fortellinger, sagn og eventyr fra Valdres. Utgiveren var på denne tiden pensjonert omgangsskolelærer i Vang. Boken fra 1850 hadde hovedtittel på valdresdialekt, «Gamla Reglo aa Rispo, ifraa Valdris», mens undertittelen var på dansk (Vang 1850). Boken ble utgitt i Kristiania, men man kan undres over hvem som var mottagerne av en så kuriøs publikasjon. Den hadde ingen innledning eller forklaring, men inneholdt kun en kort «Anmærkning» på siste side, antagelig skrevet av forleggeren Christopher Andreas Dybwad (1817–1899), som

opplyste om «Afvigelser fra Optegnerens Skrivemaade, hvilke ere foretagne for at lette Læsningen». Boken hadde 20 «numre», og tekstene var skrevet på en dialekt som må ha vært vanskelig lesbar for de fleste. Et eksempel kan være nummer 12, som hadde overskriften «Um ein Man, so vildø ut, aa stæla aa fæk den Stygge te Fylgjuskammørat», og ble innledet slik: «Ei Gøng va dæ ein Man paa ein Gar, so eittø Gløymøsta her i Valdris, ein skjikkøle Man, so aldør haddø støle ell gjort noko ilt taa se, han gjek ut seint ein Kvæld før 'n skuldø lægji se» (Vang 1850, 34f.).

Denne boken regnes som den første utgivelsen av sagn på bygdedialekt i Norge. Selv om det er uklart hvilke inspirasjonskilder Anders Evensen Vang hadde, må utgivelsen settes i forbindelse med den begynnende diskusjonen om hva som skulle være grunnlaget for et «norsk folkespråk». Denne diskusjonen hadde for alvor startet i 1840-årene med deltagere som historikeren Peter Andreas Munch, Fayes kritiker fra 1833, forfatteren Henrik Wergeland (1808–1845) og andre.

Vang hadde hatt kontakt med Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, og han var informant for folkemusikksamleren Ludvig Mathias Lindeman (1812–1887) og etter hvert også for språk- og dialektforskeren Ivar Aasen (1813–1896). Det er likevel grunn til å spørre hva som var motivet for å utgi en samling på Valdresdialekt i 1850. Det var ikke en vitenskapelig samling av sagn, men det var heller ikke en litterær bearbeidelse av folketradisjon. Muligens kommer man nærmest motivet om man definerer det som språkpolitisk og språkhistorisk.

Språkdebatten i Norge hadde nemlig så langt blant annet handlet om hva som skulle være grunnlaget for et nytt norsk folkespråk, og svaret gikk i retning av dialekter og gammelnorsk. Spørsmålet var imidlertid hvilke dialekter som kunne være best egnet, og svaret var de som kunne påvise størst slektskap med norrønt språk. Det var dette perspektivet som Ivar Aasen arbeidet utfra. Aasens verk med prøver av ulike norske dialekter utkom først i 1853. Der nevner han underlig nok ikke Anders Evensen Vang. Selv om mye av det materialet Aasen presenterte i 1853, var sagn, forholdt han seg ikke til hverken Faye eller Asbjørnsen, men opererte med egne tematiske inndelinger. Aasens interesse var det språklige og språkhistoriske, ikke sagnutgivelse som sådan, og hans noter og forklaringer bærer preg av det (Aasen 1853). Boken står derfor i nær sammenheng med Aasens tidligere bokutgivelser, grammatikken og ordboken over det han kalte «det norske Folkesprog» fra 1848 og 1850 (Aasen 1848; 1850).

At noen regnet Valdresdialekten som en av de beste man kunne bygge på, dersom man la slike kriterier til grunn, ble tydelig gjennom den neste samlingen av sagn bygget på Anders Evensen Vangs materiale. Her var inspirasjonen fra Aasens bok fra 1853 tydelig. Den utkom mens Vang var i live, men utgiveren var Johan Eberhard Nielsen (1827–1916), jurist og fullmektig i Indredepartementet i Kristiania. Han var sønn av en embetsmann, vokste opp i Ryfylke, men viet mye av sin tid til arbeid for bygdekultur og et nytt norsk språk. Boken fra 1871 inneholdt både sagn og eventyr. Nielsen løftet frem «Valdresmaalet [som] er eit av det gjævaste Bygdarmaali, og av dei som mest likjast Gamalnorsk, og Samningi hans Andres Vang er den største, som me endaa hava fenget fraa nokor Bygd. Han fortener so myket større Takk fyre sitt trottuge Stræv fyre di, at han tok til med detta paa ei Tid, daa Aalmugamaalet endaa var mismætt.» Forleggeren

var Jacob Christian Abelsted (1806–1892), en offisserssønn fra Vågå, som vokste opp hos sin onkel, prost Jacob Christian Finckenhagen (1756–1837) i Nes på Hedmarken. Abelsted ble senere eier av Vangs samlinger, og han lovte at dersom dette første bindet svarte seg, ville det komme mer, og da særlig eventyr. Dette løftet ble ikke innfridd (Vang 1871).

At det var Johan Eberhard Nielsen som fikk mer av Anders Evensen Vangs materiale utgitt, var ikke tilfeldig. Nielsen hadde få år tidligere utgitt en egen samling med sagn fra Hallingdal. Det var den første utgivelsen som Det norske Samlaget sto for. Dette forlaget ble etablert i Kristiania i 1868 med formål å utgi litteratur på «landsmål», som var navnet på det nye norske skriftspråket som var under utvikling, og dialekter. Nielsen var blant stifterne av dette forlaget (Nielsen 1868).

I innledningen skrev Nielsen at «Sogorna, som her koma, ero skrivne paa det Bygdarmaalet, som talast nørdst i Dalen, og som i Uttala skiler seg nokot fraa Maalet lenger ute. Sumt er uppskrivet av meg sjølv etter Fyresøgn men det mest af Hallingar sjølve.» Han hadde tilpasset skrivemåten noe, selv om han gjerne ville ha skrevet akkurat slik det ble sagt. Han omtalte syv lokale personer som hadde bidratt til samlingen. Nielsen bemerket også at kanskje mange «av Aalmugen» ville synes at dette var av liten verdi, men tanken var ikke å få folk til å tro på slike ting som sagnene omtalte. Det kunne imidlertid være underholdende lesning, og da kunne det ikke skade å utgi det, for endog «høglærde Menner» setter pris på slikt materiale. Grunnen til det var at det var mulig å finne elementer i disse sagnene som «minna um sumt, me lesa um i Bøker fraa Fyretidom», og noe kan også gjenfinnes i andre folkeslag «langt burte fraa Heimen, og daa tykkja dei Lærde stor Mun i aa jamnføra slike Samanhøve, kvart med annat». Boken ble avsluttet med en liten samling ordspråk (Nielsen 1868, 86–95) og en ordliste, men også den var nok for de «innvidde» som allerede var innforståtte med landsmålet, som for eksempel dette oppslaget: «Esl, Etsl, n. Aata fyre Klodyr» (Nielsen 1868, 90).

**Johan Theodor Storaker**

Johan Theodor Storaker (1837–1872) var lærer fra Søgne utenfor Kristiansand. Han ble engasjert av et prosjekt som presten og samfunnsforskeren Eilert Sundt (1817–1875) lanserte. Det gikk ut på å engasjere lærerstudenter og skolelærere til å samle inn folketradisjon, både fortellinger og opplysninger om folketro. Storaker sendte inn materiale til Sundt, som trykte det i tidsskriftet *Folkevennen* i 1862 under tittelen «Overtro og Sagn i Lister og Mandals Amt» (Storaker 1862, 369–94, 449–79). Storaker samlet folkeminner langs et bredt spekter fra sagn til folketro, delvis på grunnlag av spørrelister som den tyske forskeren Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831–1880) fikk distribuert over store deler av Nord- og Østeuropa i 1865. Etter hvert begynte Storaker å samarbeide med Ole Glambeksen Fuglestvedt (1843–1902), som var lærer, avisredaktør, gårdbruker og politiker.[4]

[4] Om deres biografier, se Storaker og Fuglestvedt 1943, 5–11.

Fuglestvedt forklarte at han oppmuntret av «en reisende Videnskabsmand» – antagelig Sundt – bestemte seg for å samle folketradisjon i Agder, og han henvendte seg til Storaker, som allerede satt med store samlinger om folketro, deriblant sagn. I 1872 sendte de to ut en oppfordring: «Det er en bekjendt Sag, at der hos vort Folk har ligget hele Skatte gjemte af Sagn af allehaande Art fra gamle Dage. Omend meget af dette er af den Beskaffenhed, at der intet Tab er forbundet med, at det overgives Forglemmelsen, er meget dog af ikke ringe Værd til Oplysning om Forholde og Omstændigheder, Kaar og Tænkemaade i svundne Tider.» Disse minnene forsvant fort, fortsatte de, så det hastet å samle inn det som fortsatt fantes. «Jo nærmere det fortalte kan lægges Folkets egen Udtryksmaade, desbedre», og «hvert Minde ombedes fortalt saa fuldstændigt og udførligt som muligt. Allehaande Bemærkninger om det meddelte vil ogsaa være meget kjærkomne». Det som ble sendt inn, ville bli publisert eller sendt til Universitetsbiblioteket i Kristiania.

De ga også en oversikt over hva de ønsket innsendt av «Folkets Sagn eller Minder» fra gamle papirer eller muntlige overleveringer, nemlig opplysninger om kirker, prester, konger og kjemper, gårder og steder, treller, kloke menn og koner, levevilkår, sed og skikk, gamle slekter, Svartedauden, opplysning og forbrytelser, folketro, ordspråk og munnhell – «Forøvrigt er Feltet vidt». Noe kom inn, men for å konkretisere prosjektet ytterligere fikk Storaker høsten 1872 trykt en avisartikkel med «Sagn som Prøver af den paatænkte Samling», men så døde han, og hans samlinger ble solgt til Universitetet i Kristiania. Fuglestvedt fortsatte arbeidet med sagninnsamlingen, og kom med nye oppfordringer i avisene i 1873 og 1875. Først ble innsendt materiale trykt i aviser, men i 1881 ble sagnene utgitt i bokform (Storaker og Fuglestvedt 1881).

Fuglestvedt medga at redigeringen hadde vært komplisert, men målet var å gjengi sagnene så nær den formen som meddelerne hadde gitt det, men det «mangler meget i Sagnenes 'naturtro', hjemlige Gjengivelse», og «det er en stor Mangel, at de ikke er fortalte paa Folkets eget Maal, hvilket jeg dog ikke har vaaget mig til at prøve» (Storaker og Fuglestvedt 1881, 5–8). Boken hadde også et tillegg som besto av sagn («Sagn fra Listerlandet») som var samlet av skolelæreren Johannes Mathias Osmundsen (1817–1904). Også dette var skrevet på dansk, men teksten ble avsluttet med et «Sagn paa Listerlands Folkemaal», som begynte slik: «Før noge øve hundre Aar sidan tente der i Præstegaren i Vanse sont (saadan) ei hæv Gjenta, som sko vere saa modig, at ingjenting kunne skrøme hende. Men saa va de ein Julaptan at Præsten ville sjaa, om ho ousaa torte gaa a Kjørka, ette dæ va bleen mørkt om Kvellen» (Storaker og Fuglestvedt 1881, 21).

**Ludvig Daae**

Ludvig Daae (1834–1910) var professor i historie ved Universitetet i Kristiania fra 1876. Han var kjent som en stor kjenner av eldre arkiver og bøker. Han vokste opp på prestegården i Kvinesdal, der hans stefar, Didrik Hegermann Brochmann (1806–1875), var sogneprest i perioden 1841–56. I sine erindringer fra denne perioden skinner det igjennom at Daae ikke hadde særlig omgang med bygdens folk, og han hadde heller ikke store tanker om dem (Knudtzon 2003, 40ff.).

I 1870 utga han en samling med det han kalte «Norske Bygdesagn» (Daae 1870). To år senere kom ytterligere en samling (Daae 1872). Den første samlingen utkom i revidert og utvidet utgave i 1881 (Daae 1881). I forordet til begge samlingene gjorde Daae rede for bakgrunnen for det materialet han presenterte. Under sin gjennomgang av eldre, skriftlig materiale hadde han også notert «Traditioner og anekdotmæssige Fortællinger, der forekom mig at indeholde et Glimt, om end tidt et flygtigt og ubetydeligt, af et forsvundet Bygdeliv eller at kaste et Streiflys over fremfarne Almueslægters Vilkaar og Tænkemaade». Han hadde lagt til også noe han selv husket fra sin hjembygd, Kvinesdal.

Daaes to sagnsamlinger ble skrevet på et ganske konservativt dansk, og var en kombinasjon av historiske utredninger om spesielle temaer og gjengivelse av muntlig tradisjon. I alle tilfeller anga han hvor stoffet var hentet fra, for eksempel i avsnittet om Røldal stavkirke, der han omtalte både tidsskriftartikler, eldre trykte og utrykte kilder, men også J. E. Nielsens utgave av Vangs sagnsamlinger fra 1871 (Daae 1881, 1–15).

Materialet fra de to sagnsamlingene brukte Ludvig Daae i et par av sine bøker. Den ene handlet om norske helgener, og i denne boken benyttet han både sine egne sagnsamlinger og Fayes sagnutgave (Daae 1879). Senere benyttet han sagnmateriale i en lokalhistorisk beskrivelse av hans barndomsbygd Kvinesdal. Daae skrev her om hvordan han som gutt kom over Fayes sagnutgave, «som jeg strax slugte», og etter hvert «paa barnlig Maade forsøgte at bruge Pennen især til at optegne de Sagn, jeg hørte om gamle Præster og fordums Hændelser i Bygden» (Daae 1894, IV).

**Peder Fylling**

Peder Fylling (1818–1895) var bondesønn fra Skodje på Sunnmøre. Han hadde frasagt seg slektsgården, og etablerte seg i stedet som samler av folketradisjon, antikviteter og oldsaker over store deler av Sunnmøre. Han hadde løpende kontakt med Bergens museum, som mottok mye av det han samlet inn. Han fortalte også sagn til Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), som besøkte Sunnmøre i 1862 med stipend for å samle sagn og eventyr (Sulebust 2002). I 1874 fikk Fylling selv utgitt en samling med sagn hos en forlegger i Ålesund. Det var en omfattende bok på over to hundre sider. Fylling skrev på dansk, og boken hadde mottoet «Ogsaa paa Møre er endnu tilbage, Gjenlyd af Sagn fra hensvundne Dage».

I innledningen til den første samlingen fortalte Fylling hvordan han hadde samlet inn materialet. I flere år hadde han reist i Sunnmøre for å samle opplysninger om fornlevninger. Under disse reisene fikk han også høre «adskillige Lokalsagn». Han skrev dem ned, og publiserte noe av dette stoffet i lokale aviser. Det gjorde stoffet vanskelig tilgjengelig, så etter oppfordring publiserte han dem i bokform. Han skrev sagnene ned slik han hørte dem, men «uden at jeg har villet iføre dem noget nymodens Klædebon, da jeg dertil savnede baade Villie og Evne». Han oppfordret samtidig andre «mere øvede Penne, end min, medens der er Tid at nedskrive de faa Levninger af norske Lokalsagn, som endnu turde findes i vore Dalebygder» (Fylling 1874, 2). Del to av samlingen utga Fylling i 1877.

**Thrond Sjursen Haukenæs**

Thrond Sjursen Haukenæs (1840–1922) var opprinnelig handelsmann i Granvin i Hardanger, der han også drev poståpneri, skysstasjon og hotell for besøkende. I 1870 hadde han møtt Peter Christen Asbjørnsen, og blitt inspirert av ham til å samle inn folketradisjon. Høsten 1882 fikk han trykt oppfordringer i flere vestlandsaviser til dem som bodde i Voss og Hardanger om å sende ham «Eventyr og Sagn, Natur- og Folkelivsskildringer». Haukenæs skrev på dansk,[5] og om dette skrev han: «I etpar af vore Aviser har jeg set Opfordring om at lade Samlingen udgaa paa Landsmaal. Dette havde nok stemt mest overens med mit eget Ønske saavel som med Indholdets Art og Beskaffenhed; men Folk er desværre endnu ikke komne saa langt, at de har let for at læse sit eget Maalføre paa Tryk, ligesom de mange Reisende, som færdes her, og som forhaabentlig vil blive mine bedste Kunder, ofte hverken vil eller kan læse en Bog skreven paa Landsmaal, og jeg er nødt til at tage Hensyn til disse Omstændigheder» (Haukenæs 1884, sitat [14]).

Bøkene til Haukenæs inneholdt referater av historiske kilder, utdrag av bøker og reiseskildringer, sagn og naturobservasjoner. I alt utga Haukenæs elleve bøker av denne typen i perioden 1884–1896.

**Olaus Martens Nicolaissen**

Olaus Martens Nicolaissen (1846–1924) var fra Øksnes i Nordland. Han var lærer ved Tromsø seminar, og fra 1880 hadde han ansvar for den antikvariske samlingen ved Tromsø museum. Som antikvar sto han bak en rekke arkeologiske og kulturhistoriske registreringer fra Nord-Norge. I tillegg utga han flere samlinger med sagn, eventyr og annen tradisjon fra Nordland, som han kjente best. Den første samlingen utkom i 1879 med et oppfølgende bind i 1887. Språket er et konservativt dansk, som for eksempel: «Efter sagnet skal Giseløen i Langenes i Vesteraalen i fortiden have været beboet af en nessekonge, Gisle, og efter ham skal øen have faaet sit navn» (Nicolaissen 1879, 5).

I 1889 kom en bok der Nicolaissen flettet sammen referater fra rettsprotokoller, små historiske avhandlinger om 1600- og 1700-tallet og nyere sagnmateriale. Han kaller dette materialet, som han tidligere til dels hadde publisert i aviser, «nordlandske folketraditioner», fordi de belyste landsdelens «sagn og historie» (Nicolaissen 1889). En ny samling fra 1891 slo an en mer naturromantisk tone, der Nicolaissen brukte sagnmaterialet for å beskrive forholdet mellom landsdelens befolkning og naturen:

> Læser! Følg en maanelys høstaften med ud til en af Nordlandskystens yderste pynter, hvor den vide havflade, belyst af maanens sølvfarvede straaler, milevidt ligger udbredt for dit blik. […] De nordlandske sagn, som har gaaet i arv fra slegt til slegt, sat sine merker i folkets sind og tænkesæt og er naaet ned til vor tid, minderne fra barndommens eventyrverden, træder klart frem for dit indre syn en saadan aftenstund ved havet.

[5] Han fikk hjelp til rettskrivning og ordning av stoffet. Se ellers Kjerland 2020.

Men også det opprørte havet, orkaner og forlis hadde ifølge Nicolaissen preget landsdelen, slik at begge dimensjoner hadde festet seg «i nordlændingens sind og forestillinger og omdannedes til sagn, som fortaltes og fandt tiltro, da de stemte saavel overens med omgivelsernes natur» (Nicolaissen 1891, sitater 2–5). Samme tone fantes i Nicolaissens siste bok av denne typen, som utkom så sent som i 1919. De mange bøkene som Nicolaissen fikk utgitt på kjente forlag i hovedstaden tyder på at de var populære.

**Konklusjoner**

Moltke Moe skapte tidlig på 1900-tallet en oppfatning av at det var Peter Christen Asbjørnsen som satte den nasjonale standarden for utgivelse av norske sagn på 1800-tallet. Moes syn på Faye og Asbjørnsen har blitt gjentatt av norske folklorister frem til i dag (Swang 1975; Hodne 1994). Begrunnelsen Moe brukte, var at Asbjørnsen gjorde sagnene tilgjengelig for et bredt publikum, han ga dem en «folkelig» form, og åpnet for at de kunne «fornorskes» i tråd med den språklige utviklingen. Moe selv deltok i denne «fornorskningen» av Asbjørnsens tekster. Grunnlaget hadde Ivar Aasen skapt med et konstruert, nytt norsk språk bygget på det norrøne språket og det han mente var de «beste dialektene», de som sto fjernt fra embetsmennenes og den borgerlige elitens uttrykksform. Moltke Moes epos fra 1906–7 var ikke et forsøk på å beskrive hvordan sagnutgivelsene utviklet seg akademisk. Han skrev et språkpolitisk essay, der sagnutgivelsene var en kulturell arena for «fornorskning». Moe var interessant nok ikke opptatt av Anders Evensen Vang, som bare få år etter Asbjørnsen publiserte sagn som virkelig var folkelige og dialektbaserte, men uleselige for andre enn spesielt interesserte. Vangs utgivelse passet ikke i Moes narrativ, som handlet om veien mot et nytt norsk fellesspråk, et «samnorsk» (Moe 1926).

Viktigere er at det i skyggen av Peter Christen Asbjørnsen – og av Moltke Moe – gjennom hele 1800-tallet fantes andre måter å utgi sagnmateriale på. De fleste av dem har hatt tydeligere forbindelse med Fayes sagnutgave fra 1833/1844 enn med Asbjørnsens tekster fra 1840-50-årene. Faye gjenga sagnene på det skriftspråket som var det viktigste grunnlaget for all undervisning og kulturell dannelse i 1800-tallets Norge. En sentral historiker som Ludvig Daae fulgte Fayes prinsipper. Den samme linjen finnes hos Olaus Martens Nicolaissen. Det var heller ikke bare embetsmenn og akademikere uten nærkontakt med den såkalte folkekulturen som utga sagn på denne måten. Skolelærere, profesjonelle innsamlere og kulturelle entreprenører fulgte den samme standarden. Gode eksempler på det er Johan Theodor Storaker, Ole Glambeksen Fuglestvedt, Peder Fylling og Thrond Sjursen Haukenæs. Å gjengi norske sagn på en «folkelig» måte eller i tråd med radikale og etter hvert ganske politiserte prinsipper om «fornorskning», var ingen faglig eller kulturell standard som dominerte norske sagnutgivelser på 1800-tallet. Det var faktisk helt motsatt: De fleste sagnutgivelsene i denne perioden var ikke del av en diskusjon om språkpolitikk eller utvikling av landsmålet, som Peder Fylling beskrev som «nymodens Klædebon». Derimot fulgte Fylling, og de fleste med ham, to andre linjer i utgivelse av norske sagn på 1800-tallet, nemlig den antikvariske, som Faye og Daae representerte, og det man kan kalle den

kulturhistoriske, altså ønsket om å redde noe som var i ferd med å gå tapt. Da var språkspørsmålet av mindre betydning.

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# RECONSTRUCTION OF RITUALS IN PRE-CHRISTIAN SCANDINAVIAN RELIGION: AN EVALUATION OF VILHELM GRØNBECH'S IDEAS OF THE 'RITUAL DRAMA'

Jens Peter Schjødt*

The recipient of this Festschrift, Terry Gunnell, has for many years treated a lot of themes within pre-Christian religion and mythology in Scandinavia. One of his main contributions and perhaps the one that has been most influential is his perspective on ritual drama, a theme that was treated extensively already in his doctoral thesis, published as *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* in 1995, and with which he has worked in many later articles.

Although, in the following, I am not going to deal in any detail with this work, it should be stated that its main conclusion has, during the years that have passed since the publication, been accepted by a whole range of scholars, and not least those based within the History of Religions.[1] Gunnell's idea is that many of the eddic poems have their basis in rituals performed in the pre-Christian period, an idea which was also proposed by Bertha S. Phillpotts back at the beginning of the twentieth century (Phillpotts 1920). Gunnell was clearly influenced by Phillpotts, although at the same time quite critical of her method (Gunnell 1995, 6–10). As he rightly says, however, for the next 50 years or so after the publication the whole idea of some cultic origin for any of the eddic poems was more or less banned under the influence of the source-critical agenda.[2] Both Gunnell and Phillpotts attained their conclusions by analysing individual

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[1] A good example is Simon Nygaard who has dealt with the subject in several publications (e.g. Nygaard 2018; 2019; 2023).

[2] This is perhaps best exemplified in Andreas Heusler's critical review of Phillpotts' book (Heusler 1922), in which he seriously asks whether there is any evidence that ritual plays existed in pagan Scandinavia (Heusler 1922, 350). Since such 'ritual plays' exist in almost all other societies, it must be taken for granted that they also did so in pagan Scandinavia, even if we do not have any direct evidence. See also a brief discussion in Martin 1972, 64–68.

eddic poems through their dramatic features, such as dialogues and elements of movements, and others, thereby concluding that behind the poems, as we have them in medieval manuscripts, some sort of performance must have been involved. Thus, for both Gunnell and Phillpotts the form was the main argument for the poems' relation to rituals and drama.

But already before Phillpotts the idea that some poems would have had a ritual basis had been proposed (cf. Gunnell 1995, 1–7). A famous example of this is Magnus Olsen's classic article "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus" (1909), which analysed *Skírnismál* as describing some fertility ritual, although rather based on the content rather than on form. A scholar with the same agenda, who is only mentioned a couple of times in Gunnell's book is the Danish historian of religion, Vilhelm Grønbech, who in his work *Vor folkeæt i oldtiden* which appeared in four volumes from 1909 to 1912 showed a strong interest in the cultic aspects of the pre-Christian religion. It was, however, only in the English translation *The Culture of the Teutons* (in the following CT) that he added an "Essay on Ritual Drama" (Grønbech 1931, II:260–340) in which he addressed the phenomenon of 'ritual drama' in more detail.[3] Like with Phillpotts, Grønbech's ideas about the ritual drama were not taken up by scholars within the field of the history of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion for a long period, even if, to some degree, he seems to have had a modest 'renaissance' in the 1980s and 1990s (see below). Although Grønbech's theoretical framework, and not least his methodological procedure is very different from Gunnell's, it is still, in many ways, the same topic that is addressed, and it seems relevant, therefore, to discuss Grønbech's contribution to the study of 'ritual drama' in the pre-Christian North in this small article.

Vilhelm Grønbech (1873–1948) has had an unusual fate in the history of scholarship. This goes for his position within the general study of religion as well as more specifically within the research history of Old Norse religion. He has been highly celebrated by some colleagues as an outstanding figure, not only in the History of Religions but in humanistic scholarship in general, whereas by others he has been severely criticised for not being critical enough, not least in connection with the Old Norse material, in his use of the sources.

At least in a Danish context, Grønbech has played a major role, not only as a historian of religion but also as an outstanding figure in the cultural debate of his time. [4] As has

[3] The whole of the second vol. of CT, however, deals more or less directly with rituals, and thus with drama. Although it has been argued by many that Grønbech only conceived his idea of the 'cult drama' or 'ritual drama' after he had published his small book *Primitiv Religion* in 1915, it has been shown by Erik Sand (1993) that this was not the case. Grønbech was well aware, long before, that there was a relationship between myth and ritual, not least through the proponents of the 'Myth and Ritual School' or the 'Cambridge school' (see Segal 1998). Many of the ideas in the *Essay* is also to be found in the last chapters of vol. II in CT, before the *Essay*.

[4] Apart from his scholarly work in many fields within the History of Religions, Grønbech was also celebrated as an important voice in the general cultural debate that went on in Denmark during the first half of the twentieth century. No less than three monographs have appeared after the death of Grønbech (Mitchell 1970; Riisgård 1974; Prytz-Johansen 1987), and many articles, dealing with various subjects in Grønbech's work have been published, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, a period which for

been shown by several commentators the two sides of Grønbech's activity can hardly be separated: In his scholarly work we often find an implicit critique of the modern Western civilisation and in his contributions to the cultural debate he often used material from the History of Religions in order to argue this critique (Bilde 1988). Not least because of this, much has been written about Grønbech, mostly in Danish, both during his lifetime and long after his death, and most often by people who admired him because of his contribution to both cultural critique and scholarly work.[5] It is certainly not the purpose of this brief article to discuss all these matters, since much is probably only really interesting in a Danish context and in relation to the cultural climate in Denmark during Grønbech's lifetime.[6] What is interesting, however, is that Grønbech, long before the heavy critique of the positivistic trends in the humanities, especially in the History of Religions, during the sixties and seventies, was very well aware of the problems with that theoretical framework, and this certainly had some impact on the 'cult drama.' The purpose, therefore, is to evaluate Grønbech's reconstruction of this cultic or ritual drama.

**Grønbech's 'Method'**

Grønbech's main argument was that we would never understand what was really going on in religions and cultures, which are at a distance from our own, whether this is in time or in geographical space, if we do not have a clear view of the totality of the culture in question, and if we do not accept the basic differences between, for instance, the pre-Christian Northmen and us, the modern Europeans (e.g. CT, I:22). To have a general idea of this culture would thus constitute a necessary prerequisite for doing religious studies at all, as he declares in the foreword to the first volume of *Mystikere i Europa og Indien* [Mystics in Europe and India] (1925–1935). The way this had to be done was by thorough philological work, by reading all the available texts, and thus by understanding the central words and notions in their historical context. At the same time, however, Grønbech was well aware that comparative work is a prerequisite because the problem is that such a general idea can hardly be achieved from the texts alone. It must necessarily be supplemented by recognitions gained from comparative studies (CT, II:272–73), something I have argued myself in a couple of publications (2012 and 2017), and to which I shall return. It seems to be more important in this connection, however, that Grønbech was well aware that, even though he insists on an objective truth (1930, 23) and rejects consistently that his method should be arbitrary, he also saw clearly that humanistic scholarship was "personel," what we would call subjective, that it was a kind of new version of the cultural and religious situation it is investigating.

various reasons, constituted a kind of renaissance for Grønbech. A brief but very useful introduction to the two strands in Grønbech's writings, the scholarly and the 'cultural critical' is Tybjerg 1996 (cf. Bilde 1988).

[5] For some of the more critical positions towards Grønbech we can refer to the references in Bilde 1988.

[6] Although, of course, the debate in Denmark cannot be seen in isolation from what went on in the rest of the world. There is thus no doubt that the civilisation critique which was so important for Grønbech can easily be found in many other countries.

This is definitely a very modern view, and I suppose that many scholars nowadays would agree without much hesitation. Further, however, Grønbech maintained that, in order to go into the thought world of a distant culture – to enter into the spirit of the people of that culture – it is necessary to escape any prejudice that our own culture will impose on us. He says:

> … we must strive to reach a point of view from which these strange thoughts become natural; we must put off our own humanity as far as it is possible and put on another humanity for the time. We need, then, to begin quietly and modestly from the foundation, as knowing nothing at all, if we would understand what it was that held the souls of these men together, and made them personalities. (CT, I:22)

This seems to be very close to the so-called *epoché*, known from the phenomenology of religion (van der Leeuw 1970, 774; cf. Bilde 1988, 16),[7] and it would certainly demand a good deal of intuition. Grønbech, however, was never explicit about these matters, even towards the end of his life and long after the phenomenology of religion had established itself as a discipline within the study of religion. Although it is a problem to which extent this program is possible, we have to admit that without attempting to view the world as it was done by the pre-Christians, we can hardly achieve anything.[8] On the other hand, we also have to accept, of course, that we will never know everything concerning Scandinavian religion and culture.

In an evaluation of Grønbech's methodological enterprise, I believe it is a bit hard for most of us to grasp the exact relation between the acceptance of subjectivity and the insistence on leaving all prejudice behind. But it seems obvious that, even if Grønbech, on the one hand, might seem a bit naïve in his belief in intuition on the part of the scholar (if you read everything carefully and without prejudice, it will be possible to penetrate the mental universe of past cultures),[9] he is, on the other hand, a modern mind. Objectivity is thus by Grønbech certainly not the same as by the positivists. He believes that the only form of objectivity is the one you can achieve by entering into the spirit of the culture in question, and this is done by studying the texts on a thorough philological basis, putting yourself at stake, so to speak. And, as we just saw, by using comparative material in interpreting the texts (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 2001, 260–61).[10]

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[7] The notion of *epoché* in Greek means 'retention' and was used in philosophical discourse for 'suspension of judgement'; and it was in this sense it was used by van der Leeuw as a kind of pure observance without any prejudice. Grønbech was also very close to the ideas of Mircea Eliade, who also had the same tendencies to turn the phenomenology of religion into a kind of cultural criticism.

[8] For instance Margeret Clunies Ross writes in the introduction to her famous work *Prolonged Echoes* that "…the only feasible course of action is to transform one's outsider status into that of a partial insider through a process of willing immersion…" (1994, 26).

[9] I must admit here that, even if I do admire much of Grønbech's work I also have huge reservations on some points. However, this is not the place to go deeper into this, although in the next section we will return to some important points (and problems) in relation to his view on rituals.

[10] This article was originally published in 1997 in the Journal *Chaos*. Here I refer to the reprint in the anthology *At fortælle historien/Telling History: Studier i den gamle nordiske litteratur/Studies in Norse Literature* from 2001.

## Grønbech on Old Norse Religion

Within Old Norse studies the source critics from various disciplines had many problems with Grønbech. Part of the critique is referred to in Meulengracht Sørensen's dissertation from 1993 (294–96) and in an article from 1997 (79–81), and there is no reason here to go into it in any detail. Axel Olrik (1909), Walter Gehl (1937) and Johan Hovstad (1943) are mentioned by Meulengracht Sørensen (1993, 296), but they were certainly not the only ones who criticised him (see for instance Christensen 1969, 9), and in general we can say that the original Danish version of *The Culture of the Teutons* was published in a period which marked the beginning of the dominance of source criticism,[11] of which Grønbech did not have much good to say. This was, no doubt, one of the main reasons why Grønbech never became part of the mainstream within the study of Old Norse religion. But just as Grønbech was reconsidered in the general study of religions in the 1970s and 1980s he was, within the field of Old Norse Studies, as just mentioned, taken up again by Preben Meulengracht Sørensen in relation to his dissertation *Fortælling og ære: Studier i islændingesagaerne* [Story and honour: Studies on the Sagas of Icelanders] from 1993. Meulengracht Sørensen was very positive towards Grønbech, and concludes his evaluation by stating that "the unique about his (Grønbech's) work, in which it differs from all the source critical works, is that instead of ignoring the subjectivity, it is emphasised as a necessary condition."[12]

Four years later Meulengracht Sørensen published an article in which he discussed Grønbech in greater detail, but not less positive (1997). As Meulengracht Sørensen rightly points out, the real difference between the source critics and Grønbech is that the latter insisted, as we saw earlier, on a kind of sympathetic insight and of a 'holistic' perspective (CT, I:205). The consequence of this is that no single source can tell us anything important about religion and culture if we do not attempt (and succeed) in grasping the totality from which we may eventually interpret the details. This is the principle, known from the 'hermeneutic circle,' and although it may very well cause circular reasoning, it is probably inescapable.[13]

It is important in talking about a 'renaissance' of Grønbech's viewpoints that we are aware that the issues that were taken up by Meulengracht Sørensen were those that were mainly treated in volume I of *The Culture of the Teutons* with subjects such as 'Frith,' 'Honour,' 'Luck' etc. These are for the most part mental notions, and thus well in accordance with the term 'phenomenology on a psychological basis' which has been

[11] I have myself dealt with some of the problems that arise when a rigid source criticism is applied (Schjødt 2012).

[12] "det særlige ved hans værk, hvorved det skiller sig ud fra alle kildekritiske arbejder, er, at han i stedet for at ignorere subjektiviteten, fremhæver den som en nødvendig betingelse" (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, 296).

[13] As mentioned, I am still not certain whether I have fully understood the relation between 'subjectivity,' 'objectivity,' 'arbitrariness,' 'sympathetic insight' (*indlevelse*) and others. This uncertainty is mainly due to Grønbech's unwillingness to discuss not only interpretative details, but also theoretical matters as such. At least a higher degree of explicitness would, I think, have made him much more useful for a modern historian of religion.

used for characterising Grønbech's 'method' (Prytz-Johansen 1987, 125). Even if, in my opinion, the description of these notions may seem, from time to time, somewhat 'impressionistic,' I agree basically that Grønbech has caught many essentials in the Nordic worldview, and there can hardly be any doubt that he has, at least to a certain extent, shown that it is fully reasonable to use, especially the *Íslendingasögur*, in the reconstruction of such notions. Still, it is my impression that the lack of explicitness concerning his theoretical and methodological framework will continue to be a hindrance to a real reevaluation of him. Therefore, it is also my impression that nobody within the field of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion has really taken up the challenge, suggested by Meulengracht Sørensen more than thirty years ago. At least, I am not aware of anything that might suggest a real renaissance for Grønbech and his research in Old Norse studies. Nevertheless, I am firmly convinced that Meulengracht Sørensen has shown beyond doubt that at least some of Grønbech's analyses of the mental notions are worth taking up again.

In the following section, however, I shall not deal with the mental notions, just mentioned, but with Grønbech's reconstruction of the pre-Christian rituals, and the problems involved.

**Grønbech's Reconstruction of Old Norse Rituals – Discussion**

In *The Culture of the Teutons* Grønbech deals with rituals and ritual performances at several places, especially in vol. II, but he is most explicit about it in his *Essay on Ritual Drama* which, as mentioned. was written for the English edition and later incorporated into the second edition of the Danish version (1955). Already in the last chapters before the *Essay* many of the themes made there, are touched upon. As we have seen above, Grønbech's method can to some extent be characterised as 'impressionistic,' which is also the case in his treatment of the ritual drama. Thus he says:

> The historian of religion will not be able to elucidate the ritual and the legends of a classical race until he has succeeded in identifying himself – so far as such an identification is possible to modern man – with the worshippers until he has learnt to look at things with their eyes, to re-experience heaven and earth, animals and plants, and convert this new experience into appropriate ideas. (CT, II:267)

As has also been mentioned it must remain an open question to which extent such an identification is possible, and it is obvious that Grønbech, in the quotation, is aware of this problem, although he may be a bit more optimistic than most modern scholars. But basically, he is right in stressing the identification process as a prerequisite, so the question is just how we can achieve an insider view (Clunies Ross 1994, 26), and to which degree Grønbech succeeds in applying his theories to concrete analyses. So let us firstly look at Grønbech's reconstructions and the way he creates them in the *Essay*.

After he has emphasised the difference between the modern play and the ritual drama (CT, II:264), he goes on to speak about how the ritual drama, as well as the legend (or myth) accompanying it, play out a sort of history, namely the history of the people

in question. Now, we may question how common ritual dramas in this sense are in the various religions, but it cannot be denied, of course, that in all religions we do find rituals that are, in some sense connected to myths,[14] or – as Grønbech would have it – legends.[15] However, this is definitely not a rule that can be applied to all rituals and we cannot, therefore, nowadays postulate any necessary connection between myths and rituals as was done up to around the middle of the twentieth century (e.g. Harrison 1912, 328; Gaster 1954, 187; Leach 1954, 13–14); and when such a relation can be found, it is most often not as straightforward, as was believed by the so-called myth-and-ritual-school (e.g. Kluckhohn 1942).[16] And this is quite important for the evaluation of Grønbech's reconstruction, as I shall return to below.

Grønbech, however, maintains that "The subject and the purpose of a ritual drama are developed in a legend which can be defined approximately as the programme of the play" (CT, II:266). As just mentioned, this is sometimes the case, but it is not a rule, and therefore not a 'key' to reconstructing the rituals. Because of the fragmentary state of the source material, however, comparative material is taken into consideration. Thus Grønbech writes: "the traces of the drama would scarcely be recognizable, if the eye of the examiner had not been trained by experience in other parts of the world where religious forms are presented in their integrity and effectual power" (CT, II:272–73). And, although he is well aware that we will never be able to reconstruct the drama in its totality, he insists, that "the fragments should be numerous enough to reproduce a variety of scattered scenes sufficient to reveal the character of the blot" (CT, II:273). In practice, thus, he uses almost exclusively mythical material for the reconstruction of the drama,[17] which is justified because he has the experience of looking at other cultures. This, in itself, seems quite reasonable, since comparisons, as mentioned, will always remain a *sine qua non* for reconstructions within a past culture.[18] The question, then, is how we can actually create these reconstructions and how detailed it can be done. Grønbech starts out by maintaining that "The dominant motif of the Northern drama is the struggle between the gods and demons" (CT, II:273), a hypothesis which, we have to say, is not argued for at all, but which may, of course, be true.

[14] Grønbech is never explicit about his view of the relation between ritual and ritual drama. Often it seems as if in his view every kind of ritual is a ritual drama, which it is not, of course.

[15] Grønbech distinguishes between "true myth and free myth or story" (CT, II:268).

[16] A good overview of this school can be read in the introduction to Segal 1998. Although Grønbech insisted on the stable relation between myth and ritual, he was at the same time well aware that the "ritual drama is made up largely of symbolic acts, in no way realistically representing the event implied…" (CT, II:265), which is no doubt true, and which is why this relation may be difficult to recognise.

[17] It should also be mentioned that Grønbech, in opposition to Gunnell and Phillpotts, takes all kinds of mythic material into consideration. Thus, he is not only dealing with eddic poems but just as well with skaldic poems, *Snorra Edda,* and other prose texts in his reconstructions.

[18] Comparisons and comparativism are and have been, since the rise of the discipline of the History of Religions in the nineteenth century, important issues in the theoretical discourse in the discipline. For a brief overview with references, see L. H. Martin 2000 (cf. Schjødt 2017).

Not surprisingly, therefore, Grønbech uses mainly the Þórr-myths in which the god is fighting against a giant, including those of Geirrǫðr, Þjazi, and Hrungnir.[19] The main ingredient in these myths is, as Grønbech maintains, "that the combat of the god was dramatically expressed in the slaughtering of the sacrificial victim" (CT, II:274). The blood of the demon is then postulated to be equivalent to the blood of the sacrificial victim.[20] Grønbech writes:

> In all probability this part of the god's exploit, his braving the streams that flowed icily cold with venom and cutting swords had its representation at the sacrifice, at the moment when the blood spurted from the victim. The shedding of the sacred blood was an occasion for anxiety and solicitous care, and it is probable that Thor's perilous march has been dramatically and symbolically rendered in the rite that was necessary to prevent the blood from running outside the vessel and being wasted. (CT II:275–76)

Further on Grønbech, based on some of the kennings in Eilifr's *Þórsdrápa,* maintains that the iron bolt which Geirrǫðr throws at Þórr, in the ritual performance was the heart of the sacrificial victim (CT, II:278). Other stages in the drama are reconstructed by taking the myths of Þjazi and Hrungnir and others into consideration. Thus, several myths which do not, in themselves, constitute a sequence are brought together in order to argue for a ritual sequence. We cannot go into more detail here, but this procedure is of course not unproblematic and emphasises the 'impressionistic' character of Grønbech's analyses. So, what has been said so far illustrates well enough the method of Grønbech as used in practice.

The question is, then, how to evaluate Grønbech's procedure. Parts of the theoretical prerequisites seem acceptable, at least to a certain extent and at a certain level. I fully agree with Grønbech that in reconstructing a phenomenon of which we have so little information as in the case of Old Norse ritual, we must, on the one hand, use our imagination. The rituals that are related in for instance the sagas are so few and the descriptions are anything but detailed, so without filling in the lacunae we cannot reconstruct much, and certainly nothing like a ritual drama, something which we must assume, was part of the pre-Christian religion.[21] Our imagination, however, must be directed by informed knowledge of the culture in question and of rituals in other comparable cultures. Thus, on the other hand, it is necessary, as Grønbech remarks several times, to know about other parts of the world and use analogies from other religions (e.g. CT, II:273, 274, 286). It is through this procedure that it will be possible to fill in the gaps in the Old Norse sources. As has been mentioned earlier, I believe that this is extremely important, and something that should be remembered by everybody attempting to reconstruct Old Norse religion. Thus it also seems convincing to me that Grønbech accepts, without further ado that some sort of ritual dramas did take place in Old Norse religion, because this is what we meet in all other religions. The burden of

[19] Actually, these myths are analysed in very similar ways, twice: pp. 229–39, and in the *Essay* (273–87).
[20] Again and again Grønbech insists that the demon, who is killed by the god is symbolised by the sacrificial victim (e.g. 328–29).
[21] 'Drama' is here to be taken in a rather broad sense, as is done by Terry Gunnell (1995, 10–14).

proof would definitely be on those who rejected such dramas. It is also true, as was mentioned above, that in most cultures we do find, at least occasionally, some relation between myths and rituals, although this connection is certainly not as common as Grønbech and most of the scholars of his time believed, notably those who were part of the Cambridge-school.

The relation, or lack of relation, between myth and ritual is in my opinion the crucial point in a justified criticism that may be raised against Grønbech: If the whole idea of a stable relation between myth and ritual proves to be false, then the reconstructions will seem much more arbitrary, than is the case, if this relation actually *is* as stable as was maintained by the Cambridge-school. It is, therefore, an important difference whether we can say: since all myths are related, perhaps even originated in rituals, we simply have to find out how this or that mythic trait may have been part of the ritual drama. Or, if we have to accept, that even if it certainly cannot be ruled out beforehand that mythic motives are related to rituals that were once actually performed, it is just as likely that the significance of such motives should be sought for in other directions. If this last-mentioned alternative proves to be the right one, then Grønbech's reconstructions may seem to be a lot more arbitrary than is the case if the first alternative holds true. For if the ritual connection is just a possibility among other possibilities, judged from comparative observations – i.e. what kind of relations can we observe in other comparable cultures (cf. Schjødt 2017) – then, it will be necessary to produce a real and substantial argument for the case. And that sort of argument is not really Grønbech's 'style,' which seems to be a major weakness in his analyses.

To put it briefly, then, we can maintain, that what Grønbech did was to create a model, based on comparative observations, and interpret the Old Norse material in agreement with this model. There is, in principle, nothing wrong with this methodological procedure and perhaps it is actually the only realistic way of proceeding. The problem, however, arises when the model is 'wrong,' i.e. if it does not correspond with reality. Grønbech's model was based on the myth-and-ritual scheme which was heavily problematised already during the 1950s and 60s, and has been left completely nowadays (Segal 1998, 12–13), not in the sense that a semantic relation between myth and ritual cannot be found occasionally in all cultures, but it can definitely not be used as *the* key for the interpretations of myth, and thus for reconstructions of rituals in general, since it is not a stable relation, and since it is not based on mythic structures and sequences that can actually be found in the Nordic material, as is the case with other sorts of rituals (cf. Schjødt 2003). To take a piece from this myth and another piece from that myth and maintain that together they would constitute a whole sequence of a ritual drama is simply not possible nowadays unless there are arguments other than those which arise from comparative analyses. In the same way, it seems quite arbitrary to postulate that the giant adversary can be equated with a sacrificial victim or that the blood of a giant is equivalent to the blood of this victim. Again: it is, of course possible, but it seems as if Grønbech, in spite of his insistence on taking all the available material into consideration, does not discuss anything that may contradict his 'intuition,' although other interpretations are just as likely. What we miss is simply that Grønbech

would accept that in order to propose this sort of interpretation, he should discuss it with other sources and other scholars, and first and foremost be willing to put his own interpretation on trial. This, apparently, is not the case, which is why his reconstruction of pre-Christian rituals was not and is not part of the more recent scholarly discourse.

**Concluding Remarks**

Taking Grønbech's reconstruction of the ritual drama as the subject for this small article, it was my expectation that just as well as his reconstructions of the mental issues of frith, honour, luck etc. have proved to be ahead of their time, also his ideas of the ritual drama could be used in a modern discourse on the Old Norse rituals. This, however, has proved to be true only at a certain level, namely when he is criticising the more or less positivistic historical source criticism. The prerequisite for this method, namely that we can make our reconstructions from such a source criticism alone, cannot be maintained from a modern point of view. Grønbech, in my opinion, was definitely right in insisting that unless we have an idea of the totality we cannot reconstruct anything, at least in relation to the subject of Old Norse ritual with the source situation which we face here. Indeed, we do need a model in order to connect the scattered evidence for these rituals into a sequential and symbolic structure.

On the other hand, we must also admit that Grønbech's model, even if we have to accept that it was basically in line with the theories current at his time, has been proven not to be in accordance with the evidence. This is not to say that there was no such thing as a ritual drama in the wide sense of the word in pre-Christian Scandinavia. I am sure that there was. It is just that a book, such as Bertha Phillpotts' *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* which was published less than ten years after the last volume of *Vor folkeæt i oldtiden*,[22] in a much more substantial and scholarly way addresses the problem of reconstructing Old Norse ritual from mythical sources. Even if Phillpotts relied too much on Frazer, and like Grønbech, the Cambridge school, she was much more aware that the case must be argued for. Like Gunnell, she did so by referring to the form of the poems and not only to the content, as did Grønbech who, as mentioned, used eddic poems, as well as poems of a skaldic kind, and even Snorri and other works in prose. He, therefore, had to focus exclusively on the content, and in particular Þórr's fights against various giants. This makes the whole of Grønbech's enterprise in reconstructing Old Norse rituals, doubtful because so much falls back on a sort of impressionistic subjectivity concerning this content,[23] without any real argument. Therefore: In order to reconstruct such rituals we need to approach the subject more modestly than did

[22] Actually Phillpotts' book were in many ways much ahead of its time, not least on the methodological level, where she was much more aware than most scholars within the field that philology in itself cannot contribute with solutions to questions concerning Old Norse rituals and the eddic poems. As she says (1920, 12): "Students of primitive literatures cannot help feeling a certain anxiety as to the fruitfulness of the purely critical philological method applied to the Edda." The dominant trend within Old Norse studies at that time was, however, highly critical towards the methods of Phillpotts (and Grønbech, as we have seen).

[23] Although this was rejected by Meulengracht Sørensen (2001, 256).

Grønbech, who believed that he could reconstruct even the smallest details, by using pieces of information scattered around in the sources.

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# ENTERING HISTORY THROUGH THE BACK DOOR: *ÞÆTTIR* FROM THE CULTURAL AFTERLIFE OF FINNUR MAGNÚSSON

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**Introduction**

In the career of every historian, there are particular historical characters who, once encountered in the source material, come to life and grow 'under one's skin' in a way that transcends mere scholarly interest, and that can be described as 'intimate.' The cultivation of such points of intimate connection with the past can lead to 'sublime historical sensations' (Ankersmit 2007) and hence fuel the historian's passion for his profession. However, at the same time, too strong a personal connection or over-involvement with a historical character – or, more correctly: with a particular *narrative* about the character in question – may lead to a certain selectivity in source material, and a subtle, unconscious distortion of the historical facts. It is therefore of paramount importance that scholars regularly subject themselves and their academic objectivity towards their subjects (Paul 2015, 139–53) to rigorous exercises in ethical self-reflection.

In this contribution, I will revisit the Icelandic antiquarian, runologist, mythologist and royal archivist Finnur Magnússon (Danish: Finn Magnusen, 1781–1847) who was a prolific scholar and highly esteemed among his learned contemporaries – including the Grimm brothers and Sir Walter Scott – but whose fame evaporated after it was established beyond reasonable doubt that the famous runestone of Runamo in the south of Sweden, which he famously deciphered after an expedition in 1833, was not a runestone at all, but rather a rockface bearing the marks of glacial erosion. The question as to how one of the most renowned runologists of his age could 'mistake' natural erosion for man-made petroglyphs and even provide a translation remains unanswered, and is a tantalising topic I have engaged with on several occasions (Halink 2015a; 2015b;

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2017; 2022). Taken together with several other unfortunate developments in both his private and his professional life (which I will address later), it is easy to read Finnur's biography as a Greek tragedy and to develop certain sympathies for this stereotypical 'antihero,' this forgotten genius and 'underdog,' whose 'tainted legacy' (Halink 2015a) has condemned him and his – in some respects very original and revolutionary – scholarship to oblivion.

Driven by this particular take *on*, or framing *of* Finnur's story as a tragedy, it also becomes tempting to ignore certain elements in his reception history that do not resonate with this narrative template. And this is where the call for professional self-reflection must be heeded; in none of my publications on Finnur and his work do I refer to the postage stamp adorned with his portrait, issued in 1981 by the National Postal Service of Iceland (Pósturinn) at the second centenary of his birth, as part of the prestigious series *Merkir Íslendingar* ('Remarkable Icelanders').[1]

Fig. 1. The 1981 postal stamp in the series Merkir Íslendingar, commemorating Finnur Magnússon at the second centenary of his birth, issued by the National Postal Service of Iceland and designed by Þröstur Magnússon. Based on the portrait by Christian Albrecht Jensen. Courtesy of the National Postal Service of Iceland (Pósturinn).

Is it not the case that only the faces of successful individuals are supposed to appear on stamps? I confess that the very existence of this stamp (on which more below) has long remained something of a mystery to me, and since this type of national celebration or even *canonisation* could not be reconciled with the tragic nature of his life and 'afterlife' (German: *Nachleben*) in Icelandic cultural memory, I virtually ignored the stamp in my publications and lectures on this topic so far. But it has always lingered on somewhere in the back of my mind, as a nuisance, an annoying cognitive dissonance, and a problem that I would have to face sooner or later.

[1] All translations in this contribution are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Through writing this essay, I finally grasp the long-awaited opportunity to set the record straight and face this blind spot in the reception history of Finnur Magnússon.[2] In order to do so, I will look at several aspects of Finnur's role in Icelandic cultural memory.

Although the secular canonisation of national heroes, or of 'cultural saints' (Dović and Helgason 2017) revolves around collective *memory* and processes of *remembrance*, it should be argued that *forgetting* and collective *forgetfulness* are of equal importance in any analysis of the rise and fall of cultural saints, or of 'remarkable Icelanders' for that matter.[3] How do these mechanisms of collective remembrance and forgetfulness operate in the case of someone who can, at least in some respects, be considered an *antihero* rather than a cultural saint? The aforementioned stamp – based on Finnur's portrait by Christian Albrecht Jensen – is here primarily a point of departure for a concise reflection on Finnur's paradoxical afterlife. By no means do I claim to offer an exhaustive or definitive exploration of all aspects of the story; the essay is decidedly kaleidoscopic in design, only engaging with several snippets or *þættir* of this reception history, mainly the 1981 stamp and Finnur's role in a recent collection of essays and stories by Magnús Sigurðsson.

**How Tainted is the Tainted One?**

Although the protagonist of this contribution may not be a household name, both his academic legacy and the remarkable story of his meteoric career have been the topic of scholarly publications. In recent years, his revolutionary role in nineteenth-century debates on Norse mythology and his work as an editor of the Eddic poems has been analysed by Annette Lassen (2018), Margaret Clunies Ross (2011), Gottskálk Jensson (2020) and myself (2015), among others, whereas his role as an ideologist and promoter of Nordic aesthetics and the revival of Icelandic literature has been studied by for example Tim van Gerven (2019; 2022, 81–92). Earlier contributions on the relevance of his academic and political views were published by Jón Helgason (1959), Páll Valsson (1997), and Aðalgeir Kristjánsson (1997; 2001), several of which appeared on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of his death in 1997.[4]

Most of these evaluations emphasise Finnur's paramount importance as a nodal point in the Europe-wide network of philologists, authors, and intellectuals – such as Rasmus Rask, Carl Christian Rafn, Sir Walter Scott and the Grimm brothers, to name but

[2] On a personal note: It was not difficult to determine the topic of my essay after being invited to contribute to this volume. Finnur Magnússon is something of a recurring theme (a *Leitmotiv* of sorts, or maybe more of a 'running gag') throughout my friendship with Terry Gunnell, especially since we share the opinion that, as a key protagonist in the history of Icelandic philology and archaeology, he has not yet received the scholarly attention he so clearly deserves. A more elaborate biographical project around his life and work remains therefore a *desideratum*.

[3] On the relevance of 'social forgetting' in the memory culture of rebellion events in Ulster, see Beiner 2018.

[4] For a more complete overview of secondary literature in Finnur Magnússon and his work, I refer to the bibliography of Halink (2015, 266–69).

a few – with whom he maintained lively correspondences. But, as becomes apparent already from the titles of some of these articles – Páll Valsson's "En runologs uppgång och fall" [The rise and fall of a runologist, 1997] and Iver Kjær's "Finnur Magnússons berømmelse og nederlag" [Finnur Magnússon's fame and defeat, 1994] for example – it is the tragic, downward spiral of his career and biography that characterises his reception history to the present day. And it is his fateful involvement with the runic inscription of Runamo, in the south of Sweden (Blekinge) that is generally considered the defining turning point, after which everything went down-hill.

In short, the 'runic inscription' in the cracked dolerite rockface of Runamo had been considered illegible already since the days of Saxo Grammaticus. But this did not stop the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters from organising an expedition in 1833, headed by Finnur, including an artist and a geologist as well, with the aim of combining forces and deciphering the undecipherable for once and for all. At first, Finnur was unable to read the petroglyphs, until he concluded these were so-called *bind runes*, which had to be read from right to left. After this *Eureka!* moment, he proclaimed to have deciphered an ancient verse, relating to the semi-legendary Danish king Harald Wartooth (Old Norse: *Haraldr hilditǫnn*) and the Battle of Brávellir (c. 770 AD). This break-through was a "moment of triumph for Romantic antiquarianism and its recovery of a glorious past" (Rix 2005, 589).

Finnur was widely celebrated for his genius, but this was not to last. The Swedish scientist Jöns Jacob Berzelius was unconvinced, and concluded – after having studied the 'runes' for himself – in 1836 that these were no hand-made petroglyphs, but rather natural cracks in the rock. Finnur did not agree and defended his interpretation in a voluminous book (*Runamo og runerne*, 1841), but a third study in 1844 by the archaeologist Jens Jacob Asmussen Worsaae confirmed Berzelius's findings, and established the general consensus in favour of the natural erosion theory for once and for all (Kjær 1994; Páll Valsson 1997; Rix 2005; Lassen 2018; Halink 2022). We will never know how Finnur came to his imagined translation. Maybe it was an inverted case of 'fake it till you make it,' that is: 'make it till you have to fake it,' in order to meet expectations and retain high status, only to completely destroy it all by doing so.

The most elaborate overview of all these events is offered by Danish author Rud Kjems, who in his book *Runamo: Skriften der kom og gik* [The writing that came and went, 2006] argues that Finnur was an honourable man who did not wish to deceive the scholarly community, but who fell victim to his own lively and Romantic imagination. Finnur never fully recovered from this immense blow to his reputation, and it has been argued that his death some three years later was the result of this humiliation; abandoned and alone, his body was found in Copenhagen on the day before Christmas, 1847 (*Stiklur* 2006). Although Kjems maintains that Runamo was one of a whole range of tragedies – on the personal, financial and professional plane – that Finnur had to endure towards the end of his life, and was therefore maybe not the sole reason for his final collapse, it certainly did not contribute to an improvement of his mental health (Kjems 2006, 119). There appears to have been a consensus among Icelanders to avoid the topic of Runamo altogether, out of respect for the ageing professor and everything

he had achieved for his fellow countrymen. But his carefully crafted reputation was under attack from other directions as well; by younger, more nationalistic Icelanders – including Baldvin Einarsson – he was accused of not taking the Icelandic cause to heart, and in the last year of Finnur's life (1847), his responsibility for a fire in which the library of the Icelandic Literary Society went up in flames weighed heavily on his conscience (Björn Th. Björnsson 1990, 127–28, 138).

**Cultural Sainthood**

According to Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, an individual's "potentials for cultural canonization" (or *vita*) consist of elements relating to personality (*persona*), transgressions (*aenigma*), artworks (*opera*), and cultural deeds (*acta*; Dović and Jón Karl Helgason 2016, 78–81). Finnur's *vita* contains many interesting elements relating to all four of these categories. He was a respected scholar renowned for his knowledge, his calmness and modesty, his willingness to support younger Icelandic students – including Jón Sigurðsson and Jónas Hallgrímsson – as well as his unwavering loyalty to the Danish throne – the king considered him a personal friend – especially in the face of a so-called 'Icelandic Revolution' instigated by the Danish maverick Jørgen Jørgensen in 1809 (*persona*). He was the author of many scholarly editions and influential studies on runology, archaeology, Nordic antiquity, philology and mythology (*opera*, in the wider sense), as well as one of the founders of the prestigious *Nordiske Oldskriftselskab* ('Old Nordic Literature Society,' est. 1825) and *Hið íslenzka bókmenntafélag* ('The Icelandic Literary Society,' est. 1816), through which he actively advocated a cultural, Nordic renaissance in Scandinavian and Icelandic arts and literature (*acta*). The Icelandic poet Benedikt Sveinbjarnarson Gröndal claimed that he was "frægur um öll lönd" ('renowned in all countries') and corresponded with many of the greatest minds of his time (Gröndal 2014, 164). The great Romantic poet Bjarni Thorarensen composed verses of praise on the occasion of the decipherment of Runamo, referring to Finnur as the true hero of Brávellir and as *Mímir* Magnússon (Mímir being the Eddic god of wisdom; Thorarensen 1834; Halink 2017, 168–69).

Another very prominent Icelander who contributed to the establishment of Finnur's positive reputation was Jón Sigurðsson, later the leading figure of Iceland's national movement, who was thirty years his junior and who – like many other Icelandic students in Copenhagen – looked up to the professor as something of a father figure. According to Jón, in his "Ágrip af ævi Finns Magnússonar" [Summary of the life of Finnur Magnússon, 1844] – speaking like a true *postulator* – Finnur's great accomplishments should not leave the patriotic Icelander unmoved:

> Hverjum þeim sem ann fósturjörð vorri ætti að vera kært að sjá minningu frægra Íslendinga á lopt haldið, og mætti það verða að meira gagni enn margur hyggur ef mynd þeirra væri í hvers manns húsi; það er og tilhlýðilegt að byrja fyrst á mynd þess manns, sem einna nafnfrægastur er allra Íslendinga, og langfrægastur þeirra er nú eru uppi.
> (Jón Sigurðsson 1844, xii)

> Everyone who loves our fatherland should be pleased to see the memory of famous Icelanders held up high, and it would be of greater advantage than many would think if their image were to be found in every man's house; it is only appropriate to begin with the image of the man who is the most famous of all Icelanders, and by far the most famous of those who are alive today.

Indeed, Finnur's portrait was not an uncommon sight in nineteenth-century Icelandic households, although his image was gradually replaced by that of his more influential postulator, Jón himself. In a way, it could be claimed that the *blueprint* for the later cultus of Jón Sigurðsson as a national hero (on which, see Páll Björnsson 2011) was created by Jón *himself*, at least as far as Iceland is concerned.[5]

According to Dović and Jón Karl Helgason, a certain level of moral ambiguity and transgression (*aenigma*) forms another prerequisite for cultural canonisation. And in this respect, one could argue that Finnur's *vita* contains something of an overdose; next to his turbulent private life – his troublesome marriage to Nicoline Frydensberg was dissolved in 1840 – and accusations of selling medieval manuscripts in an attempt to overcome his financial worries, his questionable scholarship on for instance the Dighton Rock petroglyphs in America, the infamous *Ossian* poems – which he deemed authentic – and, last but certainly not least, the unanswered questions surrounding his 'deciphering' of Runamo remain topics of speculation to this very day. Although these 'transgressions' may have tainted his memory and academic legacy to a considerable extent (Halink 2015a), it could also be argued that it is exactly this dubious, enigmatic side of his story that may render him relevant to contemporary Icelandic memory culture. Albeit not so much in the guise of a cultural saint or national hero, but rather in that of the *anti*hero, whose *vita* may contain a valuable message to all of us.

Another recurring theme or trope in the stories of cultural saints is the relocation and reburial of their bodily remains – or *relics* – as part of their canonisation process, often coinciding with serious doubt and uncertainty about the authenticity of the remains (Jón Karl Helgason 2003; Prendergast 2004; 2015; Hendrix 2019). Finnur was buried at the Assistens Cemetery in Copenhagen on Old Year's Day 1847, but his grave (number C 181) did not receive a tombstone until some thirty-four years later. One could almost interpret this simple, unworked boulder that marks his last resting place as a symbol of Finnur's fall into oblivion: the contrast with the nearby, richly ornamented grave of his more 'esteemed' fellow philologist Rasmus Kr. Rask could hardly be starker. Standing next to this "ósjálegi, veðraði steinn" ('unsightly, weathered stone') sometime halfway the twentieth century, Björn Th. Björnsson's gloomy thoughts drifted off to an old

[5] Until that time – and arguably much longer – the most popular Icelander to appear on portraits in domestic settings was undoubtedly the seventeenth-century priest and poet Hallgrímur Pétursson, who was celebrated maybe not so much as a 'great Icelander' but rather as a great servant of God: an expression of domestic piety rather than national pride. When taking into consideration the most common domestic portraits of the nineteenth century, it appears that Icelanders had – in their selection of 'big men' – a predilection for gifted individuals who combined official positions (*embættismenn*) and status with literary or academic success, such as Bjarni Thorarensen, Magnús Stephensen, and Finnur Magnússon.

painting of the coronation of Danish king Christian VIII (1840), depicting Finnur at the very height of his career, in full glory and surrounded by high nobility in the front row, right next to the king. What had happened to all that fame? Björn observes that "hvorki sól frægðarinnar né heldur sú sem hér skín slær lengur ljóma á þetta hálfmáða nafn. Ungur gróður hefur vaxið upp og kastar yfir það skuggum" ('neither the sun of fame nor that which shines here, any longer cast their beams on this name, fading in oblivion. Young plants have sprung up and cast their shadows over it,' Björn Th. Björnsson 1990, 212).

Fig. 2. Finnur's final resting place at the Assistens Cemetery in Copenhagen (grave number C 181), with the restored tombstone. Photo by the author.

When Rud Kjems visited the cemetery decades later – while working on his aforementioned book on Runamo – he discovered, much to his astonishment, that the tombstone had disappeared during renovation works at the cemetery, some twenty-five years earlier. This prompted him to turn to his publishers, the Icelandic embassy, the Arnamagnæan Institute and the Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab (among others) for financial support, so that on the 24th of October 2006, a replica of the original tombstone – based on old photographs – could be unveiled in the presence of the author and the vice-president of the Oldskriftselskab (Niels-Knud Liebgott), who held a speech on Finnur and his life in Copenhagen (*Stiklur* 2006). Due to his endeavours to resurrect his tombstone, and hence Finnur's presence in Danish and Icelandic cultural memory, Kjems can be considered his *postulator*, who – in the model proposed by Dović and Helgason – stimulates a historical person's cultural canonisation through, for instance,

the erection of monuments and instigation of commemorative events (cf. Leerssen and Rigney 2014).

**Finnur as a Literary Character**

In recent years, Finnur has made an appearance in historical novels and other literary texts. The Danish author Gorm Rasmussen made him the central figure of his novel *Skyggers levetid* [Shadow's lifetime] from 1994, and in 2015, the prolific Icelandic author Einar Már Guðmundsson published his novel *Hundadagar* [Dog days] on Jørgen Jørgensen, the aforementioned maverick who proclaimed himself ruler of Iceland in the summer of 1809. Einar Már's Finnur is an amiable, tragic person who, in his old age, laughs and mumbles to himself: "Það var guð sem skrifaði rúnirnar… Guð notar rúnaletur" ('It was God who wrote the runes… God uses runic letters,' Einar Már Guðmundsson 2016, 335).[6] These fascinating works deserve to be analysed more thoroughly in a future publication.

A recent collection of creative, philosophical essays by the Icelandic poet and author Magnús Sigurðsson entitled *Húslestur* [Home reading, 2022] contains a rather unconventional rendition of the Runamo story, in which the author allows himself to use the sources much more creatively than Einar Már did. The brief narrative – "Ef þú rýnir inn í bergið" ('If you peer into the rock,' Magnús Sigurðsson 2022, 25–35) – opens with an appropriate quote from the Talmud, "Everywhere you look there is something to see" (p. 25), which sets the tone for what is to come. The ancient 'runes' are compared to the sword Excalibur in the rock, awaiting the coming of the chosen one, "fjallahvíslarinn" ('the mountain whisperer,' p. 28), the only person capable of unlocking its mysteries. Finnur enters the stage as a self-made man: a simple country boy from Iceland, who worked his way up to the highest echelons of the Danish royal court. But his academic ambitions take the overhand, and as if driven by a semi-sacred call from Blekinge, he gives up his prestigious position of Gehejmråd and sells his manuscript collection in order to finance his *one-man* expedition to Runamo. All this is historically rather incorrect of course, as is so much in this rendition, but the author can be forgiven for claiming this poetic liberty in a collection inspired by the old Icelandic tradition of telling stories, heavily embellished by the imagination, that play with the boundaries between fact and fiction (blurb text).

The portrayal of Finnur as a crusader-like figure, who now only has one purpose in life, is overtly heroic – prophetic even, in the sense that Finnur on his way to Runamo is compared to Moses climbing Mount Sinai – and resonates with the Excalibur theme. Contrary to the actual events, Magnús's Finnur works alone, and after deciphering the runes, he disappears from the scene, living like a recluse to complete his monumental book *Runamo og runerne*. During this decade, it was as if "þagnarhjúpurinn sem hafði

[6] In the esoteric and new age scene, there are still those who actually believe that Finnur was not wrong, and that Mother Nature expresses herself through 'natural runes' at Runamo. See for instance: *Lorsque la Nature s'exprime en Runes…* on: http://lapres-mididesmagiciens.hautetfort.com/archive/2013/01/28/lorsque-la-nature-s-exprime-en-runes.html, last accessed May 2024.

legið yfir Rúnamó svo lengi hefði sogað Finn til sín líka, gleypt hann með húð og hári" ('the shroud of silence that had lain over Runamo for so long, had absorbed Finnur as well, swallowed him whole,' p. 30). After the initial success of Finnur's book, Worsaae's judgement – who is here a *geologist*; Berzelius is not mentioned – hits like the blade of an axe "af franskri sort" ('of the French kind,' p. 33), actually constituting Finnur's death sentence. All the other hardships in the runologist's life are left out of the equation in this simplified depiction of events, with the aim of enhancing the dramatic effect. And successfully so; his whole life appears to have revolved around Runamo, and it was Runamo that killed him in the end.

But, the author concludes, there is a lesson to be learned from all this. People perceive the world in different ways, and the type of person that perceives more than meets the eye – windmills that change into giants, or glacial erosion that changes into legible signs – is of a very special kind indeed. By equating Finnur with Don Quixote, the archetypal antihero *par excellence*, his monumental mistake is turned into literature, poetry even. Paradoxically – and contrary to the idea that the Runamo affair condemned him to near oblivion – Magnús claims that Finnur would have been utterly forgotten if it was not for this memorable absurdity. He even compares him to the notorious arsonist Herostratus, who, in the fourth century BCE, burned one of the seven wonders of the world – the temple of Artemis in Ephesus – only for the sake of being remembered eternally for his monumental destructiveness: "Því þannig má komast bakdyramegin inn í söguna. Með því að gera að engu eitthvað sem áður var. Og með því að gera eitthvað úr því sem var ekki neitt til að byrja með" ('Because that is how one can enter history through the back door. By reducing to nothing something that was before. And by making something out of what was nothing to begin with,' p. 35).

**The 1981 Postage Stamp**

So, after having considered all these various aspects of Finnur's cultural afterlife, what are we to make of the postage stamp with his portrait on it, issued by the National Postal Service of Iceland on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of his birth in 1981? How did this nearly forgotten, tainted name end up in a series of stamps celebrating 'remarkable Icelanders'? And what are the criteria one must meet to deserve this prestigious label?

Postage stamps constitute a popular research topic for historians of national culture, since they are designed to reflect the collective historical, cultural and natural self-image of a nation at the time they are issued. The people and themes they depict serve the purpose of strengthening the internal cohesion of the nation, by cultivating national sentiments and pride in a common heritage, great accomplishments and beauty of the fatherland. Just like statues and monuments in the public sphere, stamps and banknotes constitute a means of canonisation, of nation-building, and of *imprinting* the canonised grand narrative of the nation – on a subconscious level – into the everyday or 'banal' experience of all those who encounter these statues and use stamps on a daily basis (Billig 1995; Guðmundur Magnússon 2015). This way, stamps form a visual component of what has been labelled the "background noise of the contemporary nation" (Leerssen

2014, 30). But, unlike that of statues or monuments, the life expectancy of stamps is relatively short – before they become the exclusive interest of collectors – and there is also more 'space' for stamps than for public monuments. This means that 'stampification' can be considered a less exclusive, more modest, and less committed form of canonisation – or *pantheon*-building – than immortalisation in the form of sculptures in the public sphere, built for eternity.

Thus, historical figures who are not considered worthy of statues, could still be eligible for stampification. Especially if they happen to fit into a specific thematic series of stamps, issued by the National Postal Service. The primary requirement is that the person in question is in no way controversial, since stamps should at all times stimulate national *cohesion* rather than debate (Guðmundur Magnússon 2015; cf. Brunn 2023). This also explains the predilection for historical individuals and, in the case of Iceland, people involved in the nineteenth-century national movement – safely glorified in schoolbooks and generally considered a positive development – rather than later or still living individuals, associated with more recent and hence more controversial topics. All this goes a long way in explaining the existence of the Finnur stamp; his relative obscurity – arguably caused by *controversial* events – renders him, paradoxically, quite unknown and hence *un*controversial in the present, while his name could still be linked to high official status abroad, Jón Sigurðsson and the national movement, literary revival, and the study and cultivation of Iceland's ancient history and former literary greatness… all of which are central themes in the prevailing historical self-image of Icelanders.

The canonising function of stamps is particularly evident in the case of the series called *Merkir Íslendingar*, issued between 1975 and 1998, consisting of 28 stamps depicting twenty men and nine women – one of the stamps portrays a married couple – in total.[7] In his thorough inventory of the series, the historian Guðmundur Magnússon observes that the selected Icelanders were either poets, artists, learned men and cultural figures, or politicians associated with the country's struggle for independence or women's rights (Guðmundur Magnússon 2016), and no special anniversary or occasion was needed. The publication of new stamps in this series was generally announced in the media, but does not seem to have ignited any public debate on the choice of persons, which was in the hands of the advisory committee of the national directory of postal and phone services, installed by the minister of infrastructure in the early 1970s. Their sole selection criterium appears to have been that the Icelander in question was 'generally' considered 'remarkable' in one way or another (Guðmundur Magnússon 2015).[8] The arguments behind the selection were also never made public: announcements in the media were restricted to a short biography of the Icelander in question. When the Finnur Magnússon stamp was issued in February 1981, some magazines and newspapers devoted a few lines to his accomplishments – life in Copenhagen, antiquarian and

[7] I would like to thank Guðmundur Magnússon, Þröstur Magnússon, Jón Karl Helgason, the Icelandic National Archive, and Icelandic philatelists on various Facebook sites, who were particularly helpful in unravelling the history of this series of stamps.

[8] Guðmundur Magnússon explicitly refrains from judging to what extent the selected Icelanders meet this criterium in his opinion. He does not refer to Finnur Magnússon in this context.

mythological studies, the Icelandic Literary Society and private archivist to the king – without even the slightest mention of Runamo, or any other controversy connected to his name (see for instance *Morgunblaðið* 1981; *Æskan* 1982; cf. Jón Aðalsteinn Jónsson and Eðvarð T. Jónsson 2019, 170).

Due to the selection committee's openness towards suggestions from the general public – and, in one instance, interference from the government – Guðmundur Magnússon concludes that the series is more than a mere reflection of personal opinions, and that it is hence fairly representative of the Icelandic historical self-image in the late twentieth century (Guðmundur Magnússon 2016). One may speculate about Finnur's exact role in this self-image, but the fact that his stamp was issued simultaneously with that of his near-contemporary, the influential lawyer and enlightened official Magnús Stephensen, indicates that he is included in the sub-category of high-status *embættismenn* ('officials'). As such, this representation of Finnur can be considered an undisrupted continuation of the laudatory narrative, as initiated by Jón Sigurðsson just prior to his downfall. As if the whole Runamo affair never even happened. One could argue that the decision to ignore the Runamo story altogether – as seems to have been the silent agreement among his Icelandic contemporaries – gave rise to two very different, parallel stories about Finnur: on the one hand that of the successful and stampable *embættismaður* and scholar, and on the other the tragedy of the antihero, defeated and condemned to oblivion by runes that turned out to be no runes at all.

**Afterthoughts**

So, what are we to make of all this? How can we explain the coexistence of two very divergent Finnurs in Icelandic cultural memory? Is the 1981 stamp a mnemonic anomaly or not? If Finnur's entire afterlife is considered in the light of Runamo, it is indeed very surprising to see his face on a stamp, and not even in the category of 'biggest losers' in Icelandic history. However, the web of narratives surrounding him is more complex than that, and charting it can make us better understand how this perceived anomaly came about. What it boils down to, is that Finnur's legacy has been narrativised in two widely divergent *genres*: in the Runamo-centred *tragic* genre (especially in modern Icelandic literature) and in the originally pre-scandal *laudatory* genre (as espoused by Jón Sigurðsson, the postulator who eventually overtook his own object of canonisation).[9] It may seem surprising that this second discourse survived the Runamo scandal, but a lifeline of sorts may have been created when Finnur's Icelandic contemporaries came to a silent agreement – either consciously or not – to avoid the subject of Runamo as much as possible.[10] This might be where the 'two Finnurs' branched off from each other and

[9] These are however not the only 'roles' Finnur plays in modern cultural memory. See for instance Halink (2017, 403) on his limited function as a 'religious hero' in contemporary Icelandic Paganism (*Ásatrú*).

[10] Compare this to the fictionalised account by Magnús Sigurðsson, in which the author deviates from historical reality by claiming that the shameful affair gave rise to a wave of parodies, mocking verses, caricatures and ridicule in Iceland (Magnús Sigurðsson 2022).

gave rise to two different narratives, cultivated in divergent cultural settings (literature and the National Postal Service, respectively). For those who are determined – either consciously or not – to tell Finnur's story as a tragedy, it is virtually impossible to do justice to recent expressions of that parallel, laudatory discourse. It is interesting that, at least in the 1980s, there was still no place for Runamo in the laudatory narrative, in which the focus lies squarely on the pre-scandal successes which, in the *tragic* genre, only fulfil the narrative purpose of building up tension and dramatic effect in the prelude to the inevitable – and in this way intensified – downfall. Because it is the high ones who fall the hardest.

So, in conclusion: was the runologist vilified and virtually forgotten due to the Runamo affair, or is this monumental mistake, on the contrary, the only reason why he has not yet been completely forgotten (as Magnús Sigurðsson maintains in his semi-fictional essay)? Depending on the genre lens through which Finnur's life is perceived, both views can be supported. Ignoring Runamo on the one hand, and linking Finnur's entire life story to Runamo on the other, are the two extremes of a mnemonic spectrum. And the tragic and the laudatory interpretation also complement each other. One might even speculate, paradoxically, that the relative obscurity to which Finnur was condemned after Runamo rendered him harmless enough to become 'stampable' two hundred years after his birth, because oblivion had removed the rough edges – pro-Danish sentiments, sale of manuscripts, even Runamo – which would otherwise have made him too controversial for canonisation. In a way, it was *forgetfulness* that rendered him *salonfähig*, worthy even of modest commemoration as part of the greater success story of prominent Icelanders in high offices, and of Iceland's cultural and political 'revival' of the nineteenth century. What a way to enter history through the back door.

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# 'A VERY JOLLY LOT OF FELLOWS': MORE ON THE VISIT OF JF CAMPBELL AND GW DASENT TO ICELAND 1861 AND 1862

John Shaw*

The 1861 and 1862 journeys to Iceland by John Francis Campbell and George Webb Dasent, two of the nineteenth century's most prominent British folklorists, have received only occasional mention in the academic literature (Dorson 1968, 393; Nat. Lib of Scotland 1985, 45; Shaw 2022, 309–11) and so far have not been examined in detail. Although Campbell (1865, 414–43) later provides a wealth of geological information from his visits, no descriptions are provided of the journeys themselves or of his companions. The materials that Campbell gathered from both journeys are contained in a bound volume of his papers (Adv. MS 50.3.22) titled *Iceland* held by the National Library of Scotland, and consist of letters, sketches made by him on the journey, diagrams, photos, and printed materials. The collection is substantial, containing 183 numbered folios. Ethnological observations are rare; most of the materials deal with geological observations in the form of notes and sketches, reflecting Campbell's primary interest on both visits. However, Campbell's letters addressed to his mother often reveal a personal, carefree side to his character, seldom present in his published writings, that emerges in the context of the tours in the company of friends. The purpose of the present article, drawing on these sources, is to provide a more complete account of the very private man that Campbell was.

John Francis Campbell (1821–1885) was the son of Walter Frederick Campbell of Islay (1798–1855) and Lady Eleanor Charteris (1796–1832). Unusually for a scion of an aristocratic Highland family at the time, he was brought up in close contact with the people of Islay as a Gaelic speaker. Following an Eton and Edinburgh education, his extensive and varied scholarly interests, supported by adequate personal means,

* University of Edinburgh. The writer wishes to thank the National Library of Scotland for access to Campbell's papers and permission to reproduce the images Figures 1–4.

inspired him to travel extensively, acquiring an impressive number of languages in the process. His interest in Gaelic folk tales from the time he was a young man developed into a large project of tale collection throughout the Highlands, and ultimately in the publication of a four-volume bilingual collection, *Popular Tales of The West Highlands* (1860–1862), still a standard work in the field.

George Webb Dasent (1817–1896) was born in Saint Vincent, British West Indies, and was trained in the Classics at Oxford. While serving as a diplomat, he developed a lifelong interest in Scandinavian literatures. He is best known for his translations of Norwegian tales of Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, *Popular Tales from the Norse*, and of the Icelandic *Njáls saga* (Dasent 1859; cf. the detailed discussion of Dasent's works in Wawn 2002, 142–82). In addition to his career as an academic, he held the post of assistant editor of the *Times.* Campbell was a great admirer of Dasent's scholarship. From Campbell's papers, their correspondence began with the letter from Dasent in early 1859 (Adv. MS 50.1.1) and developed into a productive friendship based on shared interests with useful advice from Dasent enthusiastically applied by Campbell in his fieldwork. Their first tour of Iceland was probably organised by Dasent.

**The 1861 Tour**

From the evidence in the letters, the first tour took place from 18th July to 30th August, with no mention of travelling companions in addition to Campbell and Dasent, except for the Icelander mentioned below by Campbell, possibly a factotum for the journey. The account begins with the letter from GWD regarding steamer reservations:

> There is a steamer to Iceland on the 15th–20th July returning from Iceland August 17th. That will give rather more than three weeks.
> In the island about enough time to see the Thingvalla, Geysers Heckla and Kötlugjá.
> Fare £5 […] & £5 back. Eating 2S a day!!
> Not very expensive. The boat is lively but seaworthy not like Flom's tub. I have written to take my place and I think you had better let me order a berth for you […]
> The Icelanders are quite pleased with Njál which is a great comfort, as they are hard to please. More tomorrow. Meanwhile yours ever, GW Dasent.[1]

Campbell's first letter from the tour to his mother was written from his club on Princes Street, Edinburgh on the day of his departure. For a man just short of forty and aware of it, the tone conveys a sense of adventure and anticipation—of 'an open road' of strenuous activity in keeping with his lifelong enthusiasm for sport and the outdoors:

> New Club
> 18 July 61
> My dear mother,
> All right so far. We have been wandering about all day gathering.

[1] Folio 1–1A. This and the letters following are transcribed *literatim*.

The Icelander & an artist & author are here also. We go to Grangemouth at 5 by train and sail at 10. The wind is up. I have the steamer said to be a very good one – The next will be from Orkney or Faroe or some such place […] The Icelander seems a cheery fellow and I like his face. He is to do everything and I see he is a good chap ---
We shall have as I expected very little time for anything but scampering as hard as we can go but that will be better for my constitution unless it has changed of late years. – nous verrons –
JFC[2]

Nine days later, Campbell wrote from Reykjavík:

July 27th, 1861
Reykiavik
My dear mother,
I had no time to write as we are just starting but there is a yacht just going South so I send a line to say that I am alive – Had a whale hunt at Faroe and bagged 140 whales. I never saw such fun in my life. I struck one myself and there were about 4 or 500 men and a great lot of boats. Under a glorious waterfall in a deep Fjörd. We have got a whole tribe of ponies and a luggage train and two guides and we are off. –
I think I shall come back by the steamer but if I like it I shall stay on till the next. […]
Somewhere about the 1st of September we may perhaps be heard of, but it is quite uncertain. The steamer is a very good one and so far all right
JFC[3]

Figure 1.

[2] Folios 8, 9.
[3] Folios 24, 25.

Campbell's dramatic sketch shows the whale hunters in full pursuit, backed by the waterfall in a mountainous landscape.[4] The allusion to numerous ponies and a luggage train indicates that such an apparently small expedition travelled with considerable baggage.

On his way back from Iceland toward the end of August, Campbell writes again, summarising the tour and noting, perhaps not without pride, the reason for the muddy stains on the letter paper, and the virtues of a vigorous approach to touring:

> Thursday Aug 29, 1861
> Arcturus off
> Peterhead. Shaking a good deal.
> My dear mother,
> We expect to be at Grangemouth tomorrow and at the New Club in the evening […]
> We had a very jolly time of it and we seem to have done more in a short time than any of the others. We had famous weather and no one has been ill or out of sorts.
> This paper has been in a bog so excuse its very dirty appearance. [It's] not a whit more dirty than the writer. I shall tell you all our adventures when we meet. This is only to let you know that I am alive. We have not one word of news since we started and are of course rather curious to know what has been going on in the world.
> what to do. Telegraph if necessary to the New Club. […] Dasent wants to be remembered to you.
> My love to all of you
> J.F. Campbell[5]

**The 1862 Tour**

The 1861 tour, by Campbell's standards at least, was a resounding success, leading to a tour the following year on a larger scale and more thoroughly recorded. Toward the last of the folios for that year, Campbell noted down a written itinerary of the journey from Friday 18th July to Sunday 31st of August.[6] In it are listed the names of places visited in Iceland with the dates, along with the record of the weather conditions and the occasional sportsman's aside ("Wednesday 29 at Thingvella. shot a lot of birds;" "Sunday 10 at Melar. 2 salmon").

Campbell's four travelling companions were by any standard a select company, highly educated and largely drawn from the aristocracy. In addition to Campbell and Dasent, listed in the itinerary were Lord Newry, a Mr Dakyns and Charles Clifford. Lord Newry (Francis Charles Needham, 1842–1915), then about 20 and an undergraduate at Oxford, was later to serve as MP for Newry. John Roche Dakyns (1836–1910), a geologist from Cambridge, was a relative of Dasent's and like him was born in Saint Vincent, British West Indies.[7]

[4] Folio 16. For a separate account of whale hunting in the Faroes, see Dasent 1873, 54–67.
[5] Folios 45, 46.
[6] Folio 138 and preceding page.
[7] Obit in *Geological Magazine* 7, no. 12, 575–76, December 1910.

Of no small interest to our story is Sir Charles Cavendish Clifford, 4th Baronet (1821–1895). Classically trained and widely travelled, he served as MP for the Isle of Wight and Private Secretary to Viscount Palmerston. Whatever interests Clifford may have had in geology or Norse traditions are not apparent from the record, and as he hints below he may have come along simply on a whim. By his own account, Campbell had met him at their club, mentioned the upcoming tour and invited him along. Following the summer of 1862, Clifford, under the pen name 'Umbra' (who seems to serve as a fictional and insubstantial sixth presence on the tour and a *Doppelgänger* for Clifford), authored a humorous account of the tour (Umbra 1863, Folio 145). It was later described by Campbell (1865, 420) as "a clever pamphlet" and is among the papers from the tour. Together with the pamphlet is a note from Clifford:

> 7/2/63
>
> Dear Campbell,
>
> I want your Photo and send you mine in which by careful observation you may make out the whispy sealskin […], pipe and knife –
>
> In a short time my journal will be privately printed and of course I will send you a copy. It is very short, but most severe. You however come off pretty well.
>
> Charles C Clifford[8]

Clifford's work, 44 pages in length, is written from the perspective of a classically educated, seasoned world traveller. It is by no means intended to be taken literally, but rather as a playful, tongue-in-cheek description driven by hyperbole and its author's self-admitted tendency toward verbosity. Clifford's approach is expressed in a typically droll way: "Reader, I say, know this, be well assured of one thing, that truth, sacred truth guides my pen, and all that is here related is matter of fact history." (Umbra 1863, 6). The title, *A Tour Twenty Years Ago*, for a work printed in 1863 leads to a suspension of belief and a sense of distance in the name of lighthearted whimsy. His fellow travellers are lampooned, though not unkindly, and given nicknames that are easily recognised: Campbell is Archibald M'Diarmid; Dasent is Mr Darwin; Lord Newry is Regner; Dakyns is Mr Digwell; Clifford is Mr C---; and Umbra 'the historian of this journey' is the playful chronicler/narrator. The account is not entirely unreliable, however, as evidenced by the fact that it corresponds well to the locations in Iceland, their sequence and various incidents recorded in Campbell's itinerary and letters.

The character descriptions of his companions, though irreverent, are not entirely unfounded:

> First—he who by tacit consent was reckoned the head of our party, was surnamed Archibald M'Diarmid. I believe the addition of Esquire is considered a sort of insult in the Highlands, whence he came, so I omit it. M'Diarmid, like Crichton, did all things well, being a first-rate sportsman, a good draughtsman, was a follower of Science, and an author to boot. He possessed qualities of coolness, deliberation, and courage, that would have fitted him to be the leader of a party, bound on an expedition far more adventurous than our own. He was

[8] Folio 144.

moreover a pleasant companion, but, lest it should be thought that I am describing a too perfect character, I will admit that he cherished two superstitions. First he believed in Ossian— secondly, he held it as an article of faith, not to be doubted, that his tent was completely waterproof.

Next to him I will introduce Mr. Darwin, a really celebrated personage. He had written a learned book on Northern Antiquities, in recompense of which a Scandinavian Potentate created him a Knight of the second class of the Order of the Walrus, the riband of which illustrious Order was suspended across his brawny shoulders. Of Herculean height and strength, with his long black beard descending to his waist, he resembled a Viking of old, and such I conceive he at times supposed himself to be […] I fear he preferred the glorious dream to the sober reality.

Third was Regner, Lord Lodbrog, an Irish Peer, and then a student at the University. He derived his descent from a chieftain of that name, who had slain a dragon, after encasing himself in impenetrable hairy breeches, and it was still a custom in his family, out of respect to this ancestor, to wear hirsute nether garments. How gay was Lodbrog! the life and soul of our company— his cheerfulness never failed. As he cantered on ahead of all, […] he was hailed by us as decidedly the "Skarzmadur" or Dandy of the Party.

Fourth was Mr. C--- , a Member of Parliament, who had come out late in the Session. I am not aware that he ever enlightened the Senate by his eloquence. He was rather a silent reserved person, and his chief talent seemed to consist in smoking tobacco. However, to do him justice, he was always good tempered, lent a willing hand at the packing in the morning […]

Fifth was Mr. Digwell, a relative of Mr. Darwin, fellow of a College at Cambridge, and unfortunately for him smitten with a taste for geology, which had impelled him to come to Iceland. He was a tall thin man, and always carried a hammer to aid him in his favourite pursuit […]

Sixth and last came I, Umbra, the historian of this journey. Of myself little can be said—I was called to the Bar, and have no doubt whatever that I should have become Lord Chancellor if I had ever had a brief given me, but I never had— "c'est le premier pas qui coute." I could not invent briefs. In the meanwhile I had settled down to be a constant attendant at my Club, and bid fair to become what the youngsters call a "Fogey," or an "Institution." My chief diversion had hitherto been to travel in the South, and thither was I again bound, but was checked by two considerations. Either I must have proceeded through Switzerland, which I knew by heart, and was sick of meeting gentlemen carrying Alpenstocks, engraved with the names of mountains which they had never been up […].

While in this state of indecision my friend M'Diarmid met me at the Club, and said "Come with us to Iceland." This was new, this was original, unexplored ground, so I came. Differing as we did in years and other respects, it was wonderful what a harmonious party we proved.[9]

Campbell's own account of the journey begins in London, 2 days before the departure of the steamer:

Niddry Lodge
Kensington W London
[18th] July 1862
Friday Starting at 8.40 […] No porters to be had. So piled all the traps on a barrow and wheeled them to the van to the great entertainment of the officials. –

[9] Folio 144, 2–6.

Dasent, Daskyn, Lord Newry and Clifford […]
Arrived about 7 – sent trap to station. Dressed at club. Breakfast at Proven's Hotel. Bought boots and waterproofs for servant tho inhabitants much struck by the appearance of the party. The little boys called Bloody painters and the shop people looked as if they thought we had designs on the property and looked very sharp.[10]

Figure 2.

On the following Sunday as he prepared to board the steamer to the Faroes and Iceland, he noted again:

Sunday night 20 July 1862
Peterhead

So far all right except it has been blowing very hard. We stopped here to let the wind go down and now it is getting calm. We have a very curious lot on board amongst others a deaf and dumb Frenchman who talks on his fingers and is very amusing. Thomsen[11] is here in very good humour and has found four or five of his countrymen who are very good fellows. Mr Bryson the Edinburgh watchmaker has another party who are going to photograph and take temperatures in the geysers and do all sorts of learned things. In the mean time they get drunk and make a desperate row abuse lords and such like. – Dasent was in a great indignation but as Clifford remarked he was pacified by the watchmaker who said he had read his book & admired it.
There are also some Icelandic ladies one rather pretty Lord N has been taking her portrait and making himself very pleasant […] We are to sail again at midnight but if we go on anchoring so often when we arrive is doubtful – and now good night.[12]

[10] Folios 55, 56.
[11] A Danish(?) geologist also mentioned below (15) by Campbell.
[12] Folio 54. Cf. Bryson 1864, 4. Clifford (Umbra 1863, 30–32), while altering the name and the place, may be alluding to the repartee of the same conversation.

Within a day of debarking at Reykjavík, he wrote his mother to say that they had had a safe passage:

> Reykiavik July 26/62
>
> My dear mother,
>
> A yacht is going to sail in a few hours, and we have just arrived. We have had a rough passage but a very jolly one. Last night we sat up till two singing and drinking punch and making a tremendous row with a lot of Icelanders and Danes and Scotchmen. On Wednesday we landed at the Faroes and took long walks in various directions. Today we are in a desperate hurry gathering horses and getting ready for a start. Clifford means to stick to us and we have a very jolly lot of fellows. Newry is a very nice young fellow and Dakyns not a bad fellow though desperately ugly. Will you please buy for me a lot of photographs of the exhibition […] I want them for presents. I really have nothing to say but that we are all well and hope you are the same. We hear that there is an eruption going on somewhere in the north but whether we shall go that way or not is uncertain.
>
> I will write again by the steamer but probably this will reach you first. If you cannot get exhibition photos get me some portraits of kings and queens, Japanese ambassadors and such like celebrities. –
> J.F. Campbell[13]

Presumably mindful of the scarcity or unreliability of mail from Iceland, Campbell wrote again the following day, this time to be sent by steamer, mentioning in passing the logistics necessary for organising a Victorian gentlemen's expedition.

> Reykjavik
> Sunday July 27, 1862 Arcturus steamer
> My dear mother,
>
> I wrote you a letter yesterday by a yacht which set off forthwith. You should get this also before you start, but if not it can't be helped. – As I have said we had a rough voyage but a very jolly one and arrived here all right at about 10 a.m. I was the first to land and set to work forthwith gathering guides and so on. I think we shall start tomorrow. 22 horses have been bought already and more are to come. Last night we took a wander along the shore to a hot spring which rises in a small hollow about two miles from the town. We found the place and a dam made by the French sailors in the burn which runs from the spring. The water was about 80˚ so we stripped and jumped in and swam about in the tepid water and enjoyed the first good wash for a week. The spring itself is about 170°, hot enough to cook eggs in. We had none to cook but there were plenty of shells and broken bottles showing the tastes of the natives. A lot of cows were browsing on the rich grass which flourishes in the hollow, and some of them stood close to the spring chewing the cud thoughtfully in the steam while the setting sun threw their blue shadows on the white mist like great long legged ghosts of cows. It was quite calm and very warm and the hills and the sea & the islands in the bay made as pretty a picture as one could fancy. There we lay & smoked and watched the shadows and exclaimed how beautiful! How jolly! While the old cows seemed to think so too. At last as it was nearly ten o'clock the cows thought that it was time to go home, so one stepped deliberately down to the

[13] Folios 78–79.

> burn and smelt at it, and then put one foot in and then the other, and then as the water was scalding hot this old brute gave a spring out on the grass, curled her tail over her back and set up a wild dance – utterly at variance with her previous staid demeanour. We lay on our backs and roared with laughter. Then came a calf who did the same thing, only when his dance took place he shook his scalded heels in the air […] The brutes speedily resumed their placidity and we walked off to our home in the stream where we had some tea & went to bed by daylight at midnight.
>
> Today the weather has been beautiful again. We put on our best clothes and went to church where we heard what Dasent called a very good sermon. I did not understand it so read my bible instead of listening. There were some queer caps on the heads of the female natives and some of the men were very good looking. After church we called on the collector of Icelandic tales and I gave him a copy of my book and got his in return all very pretty and nice.[14] Then we called on the governor and got some wine & a cigar, and then we came home.[15]

Clifford does not say whether he was with Campbell for the bath in the hot springs and the amusing spectacle, but provides a similar, though more blasé account of the preparations for the tour:

> […] Boot and saddle! to horse to horse! let us be off. Sound thy horn, Regner, sound it loud and blaring through the street of Reykjavik. After some delay our ponies were bought, paid for and shod. The luggage is at last packed, the guides are mounted, and the cavalcade is ready to start. Forwards – march, sound thy horn, sounded yet again, the echo falls through all the intervening time not unpleasantly on my ear.[16]

After the company had been travelling for a few days, their visit to Reykholt on 5th August is the subject of a lively description by Clifford which contains some of the rare ethnographic information recorded on both tours. The place is noted only in passing in Campbell's itinerary; nevertheless, he provides a sketch of the settlement (Fig. 3 below).

> All next day we rode North, and in the afternoon descended into the Reykholsdalr, which was nearly parallel to the adjacent vale of the Hvita. Puffs of white smoke in the distance gave notice of the hot springs of Reykholt, and when we arrived at that place we found the whole population busy in making hay […] The houses of the farmers and clergymen (there are none other) are all exactly alike. At a little distance they make rather an imposing figure, having many gables like an Elizabethan country house; but on a nearer approach the greater part is found to consist of appurtenances, such as barn, stables, fishstock-house, tool-house, &c, &c. In fact the actual house contains only one sitting room, which is always secured by four doors, one within the other to keep out the violent wind that blows in winter. The walls of the house are of stones and peat, and a crop of grass always grows on the roof.
>
> The churches are of wood brought from Norway, and dragged by horses up the country. The Church of Reykjavik is the only exception, being of stone, and is considered a marvel.

[14] In his notes written on the same day (Sunday 27th July, Folio 75 verso) Campbell identifies the clergyman as Jón Árnason, author of the story collection *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*; cf. Shaw 2022, 310–11.

[15] Folios 80–81.

[16] Umbra 1863, 6–7.

Darwin had been particularly anxious to visit Reykholt, in order that he might inspect the bath of Snorro, a distinguished bard and warrior, who had composed many songs, and killed many people in his day.[17]

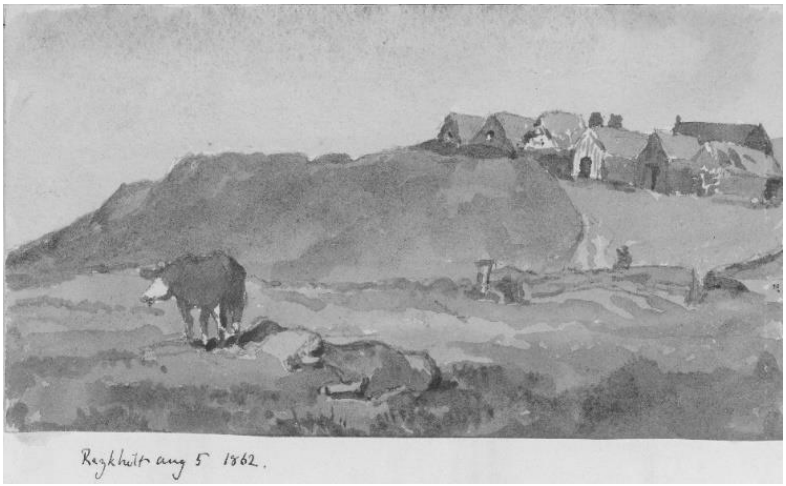


Figure 3. Sketch by Campbell of Reykholt.

The ascent of Eiríksjökull, recorded in Campbell's itinerary as having taken place in fine weather on the 6th of August, is arguably the most physically demanding episode of the tour. Clifford's account, however reliable, provides some suggestions of the circumstances and personages involved.

> M'Diarmid, being by nature and constitution a sort of Spartan, was in favour of anything that entailed fatigue or endurance. Another said Eyrik's Yokul was the Key of Iceland, and it would redound to our glory. A third remarked that it would be a jolly lark. Mr. C--- was decidedly averse to going up […] At last it was resolved by a large majority to make the attempt […] Still up, up, up, till at last the resolution of some failed and they announced their resolve to return.
>
> And now it seemed that the ascent of the key of Iceland was to be abandoned; for M'Diarmid alone who though just then the most tired of all, yet loving fatigue for fatigue's sake, was still indomitable, M'Diarmid alone seemed averse to giving it up, when Mr. C--- who was considered the most sluggish of the party, and was just then lying exhausted on the snow, got on his legs and made us a speech! […] M'Diarmid, Mr. C---, and the poetic Digwell pursued their upward way, and in the course of another hour succeeded in reaching the top of the dome […] We arrived at our tent at twelve, our expedition had taken exactly thirteen hours in all, we supped; the Key of Iceland had been scaled,—that night we slept well.[18]

[17] Ibid., 17–18. Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241), poet, statesman and a primary source for Norse mythology was assassinated at Reykholt.

[18] Ibid., 18–22; cf. Campbell 1865, 420–23.

The weeks of living close to nature in the Icelandic climate were not entirely without their discomforts, when according to Clifford and noted in Campbell's itinerary, their tents were flooded on the night of 17th August at Stapi:[19]

> […] in the middle of the night I was awoke by finding myself lying in a pool of water, which had somehow accumulated, and all the rest of the night the rain, soaking through the canvass, slowly trickled drop by drop on my face." […] The morning came cold and gusty, and it speaks tomes for the inflexibility of Scotch morality, that though we knew there was comfortable shelter at Budir, three hours distance, M'Diarmid refused to violate the sanctity of the Sabbath by travelling […][20]

Figure 4. Clifford, Dasent, Lord Newry and Campbell at their camp.

The inevitable hardships of overland travel and sporting, however, did not detract from Clifford's frank sense of wonder at seeing a display of the Northern Lights at Hítardalur in Mýrasýsla on Tuesday 19th August:

> That night the Northern Streamers played in the sky with pellucid lustre. Wavering, flickering, radiating, the silver light took ever-varying shapes, and now it hangs like a transparent shroud in the heavens. Was it an omen? [21]

The end of the journey is described by Campbell in his final (undated) letter to his mother upon his return to Scotland, presumably on or about August 31st:

> After the geyser we rode west and had very fine weather & good fun […] Then came a general desire to get to Rejkiavik because the rain dripped upon people's noses in the night time. So off we set and then came fine weather so the pace slackened and we got in on Saturday night. The steamer sailed on Monday. We sold 30 horses by auction and sailed at noon and here we

[19] Modern Arnarstapi on Snæfellsnes Peninsula.
[20] Umbra 1863, 34.
[21] Ibid., 38.

> are washed and in good health & good spirits […] I have seen no body here yet but the bottom of a deep tub. We are to have a dinner here tonight and then scatter –
> The volcanic eruption was a fact – Thomsen saw the smoke at a distance.[22]

Clifford's account is rather different. With the exception of himself and Campbell, who returned to the comforts of their usual lives and their clubs, his forward histories of the others do not correspond to their actual biographies. Their post-tour stories are fanciful, in some cases bordering on the bizarre. Ever good-humoured, Umbra concludes his chronicle by saying:

> M'Diarmid flourishes, but is grown rather stout for a Spartan. I used to look at the Parliamentary debates in the papers, thinking that Mr. C--- might bring the affairs of Iceland under the consideration of the House, but I have long given up that expectation. To be sure there is nothing to be said about them. He, M'Diarmid, and I sometimes meet at our Club, dine together, and talk over our tour "die frohe tage" of our prime.[23]

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[22] Folio 137 (b, c).

[23] Umbra 1836, 44.

# REORDERING THIELE: PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF LLM-BASED TOPIC MODELING FOR FLEXIBLE CLASSIFICATION OF EARLY LEGEND COLLECTIONS

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**Introduction**

The classification of stories, whether in archives or published collections, is a longstanding problem in folkloristics. Recent advances in natural language processing, deep learning, and methods for storing and retrieving data present possible solutions to some of the vexing problems highlighted by Heda Jason and Alan Dundes, yet the implementation of these methods presents some of their own challenges (Jason 1969; 2006; Dundes 1997; Harun and Jamaludin 2013; Tangherlini 2013; Meder et al. 2016). Classification is fundamentally predicated on the discovery of patterns in the feature space of items that constitute a target domain. Classifiers for folktales and legends are among the first classifiers in our discipline and have had considerable impact on folkloristics research in the ensuing years (Aarne 1910; Krohn 1926; Thompson 1927; 1955; 1961; Christiansen 1958; Dundes 1997; Uther 2004). In most folk narrative classification systems, the goal has been to group items first according to genre, leading to divisions such as fairy tales, legends and ballads. Subcategories are in turn based on easily identified features of content including classes of location, such as churches, classes of actants, such as elves or ghosts, or classes of action, such as treasure hunting. These groupings are frequently joined to create straight-forward shallow hierarchies, such as "legends about the supernatural—elves," or "legends about places—churches," thus creating systems reminiscent of the tree models of Linnaeus' early natural classification system (1758). The goal of this study is to explore one of the earliest Danish legend collections, Just Mathias Thiele's *Danmarks Folkesagn* (1843), and propose a

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complementary and alternative classifier by leveraging the affordances of machine learning and network theory.

In their study of the consequences of classification systems, Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Star note that, "In an abstract, ideal sense, [for] a classification system… 1. There are consistent, unique classificatory properties in operation… 2. The categories are mutually exclusive… [and] 3. The system is complete" (Bowker and Star 2000, 10–11). One might quibble with the necessity or even the propriety of point two, since mutual exclusivity proposes a single dimension of classification. One could instead imagine a multi-label classification system that, for each class creates a single label for an item, so that an item could have multiple labels, each derived from a different part of the system. For example, a story in a narrative collection might be given labels, legends—told by women; legends—supernatural—ghosts; legends—places—Rødby church; these labels would describe a ghost story told by a woman where the action takes place at Rødby church, and could thus be discovered by a researcher interested in any one of these dimensions. Such a system would add a concept of relationships to the classification system, providing what is often referred to in data science as an "ontology" (Sowa 2000, 492). Of course, Bowker and Star go on to note that, "No real-world working classification system… meets these 'simple' requirements and we doubt that any ever could" (Bowker and Star 2000, 11). Despite their various failings, classification systems for folklore collections still serve multiple purposes. They provide insight into the perspectives of folklorists who created and classified the collection, thereby mapping out folklorists' cognitive engagement with the expressive space, and they often offer the best and easiest means for navigating the collection.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Thiele created one of the earliest Nordic collections of folklore to be systematically collected and classified. Thiele, a Danish polymath who accidentally became the first folklore fieldworker in Denmark, was inspired in no small part by the work on legends of the Grimm Brothers in Germany (Tangherlini 2022). Terry Gunnell, in his comprehensive work on the impact of the Grimms on Nordic folkloristics, notes that Thiele was part of a vanguard of early folklorists throughout Scandinavia whose work aligned with a burgeoning wave of Romantic nationalism (Gunnell 2022, 4–5). Although Thiele's earliest collection of eighteen legends, *Prøver af Danske folkesagn* (Thiele 1817), had no obvious classificatory logic, by the time of his *Danske folkesagn* with 641 legends, one could glean the beginning of an ordering principle for the tales, with each volume following a general logic of legends related to historical events and places placed earlier in the volumes, and legends about supernatural encounters or demons placed later in the volumes, with each of the four volumes arranged independently (Thiele 1818–1823). Although Thiele took a multi-decade hiatus from folklore collecting and curation soon after the publication of this work, he returned to the folkloristic fold in the 1840s. *Danmarks Folkesagn* is a three-volume expansion of *Danske folkesagn*, re-conceived and considerably enlarged by approximately 300 legends (Thiele 1843 [1968]). In this work, a clear classification principle takes hold. Thiele develops a shallow hierarchical classification system for the stories: in the first volume, there are two main divisions, one for historical legends [*historiske sagn*] and one for place

legends [*stedsagn*]; there are also two main divisions in the second volume, one for legends about natural phenomena [*sagn om naturgenstande*] and one for legends about the supernatural [*sagn om det overnaturlige*]. The third volume, *Den danske almues overtroiske meninger*, comprises descriptions of folk practice, folk medicine and other beliefs; these entries are not integrated into the classificatory scheme of the first two volumes. Each of the four main classes of the first two volumes is further divided into several subclasses (between two and six for each class), with the troll subclass in the supernatural division further divided into a series of fifteen smaller subdivisions (Tangherlini 2022, 103). Although the classification is rudimentary, it immediately allows for the easy navigation of the story space according to a series of well-defined criteria. Because there is no additional indexing in the original apart from a place name index, it is nearly impossible to find overlap between stories, or understand the relationships between classes.[1] Similarly, it is not always clear why a story is placed in one class and not another, a common problem confronting classification systems that double as tables of contents for a specific collection.

Despite these problems, Thiele's classification system had considerable impact in the burgeoning Scandinavian folklore collection landscape, standing as a model for many subsequent collections. Perhaps foremost among the collectors who took, at the very least, inspiration for a multi-level classification of folk narrative from Thiele's initial classification was Evald Tang Kristensen, whose more elaborated classification of Danish folk legends recapitulates many of Thiele's classes and sub-classes, although notably discarding the main categories (Kristensen 1892–1901; 1928–1939). It is likely no accident that Thiele's early classificatory scheme also echoes in Reidar Christiansen's catalog of Norwegian legends, which acts as the basis for his proposed typology for the migratory legend (Christiansen 1958). As with nearly all these approaches to classification, the underlying structure of the system is a tree, with individual items (legends in this case) representing the leaves. Despite the usefulness of these classification systems, the challenge remains that, if one's research question or questions do not align with the overall structure of the classifier, then finding similar stories *across* classes is a challenging and time-consuming undertaking.

There have been numerous endeavors that aim to provide additional methods for navigation across collections, where the new classification does not supplant the earlier classification but acts instead as a supplement. Arguably, Bengt Holbek's work with the Danish fairy tales presents a series of different classifications of the same material, with the result that one can traverse the Kristensen fairy tale collection along several different, independent axes (Holbek 1987). Foremost among these is the use of the storyteller as a basis for classification—since storytellers can also be classified according to broad groupings, such as gender, age, employment, or associated places, the method allows one to not only consider aspects of the stories-as-told, but also aspects of the telling and teller. In earlier work, I expanded on these approaches specifically focused on providing

[1] This problem has been attenuated in the later publication edited by Per Skar, which includes a rudimentary index along with an index of personal names (Thiele 1968). Data for this project is available through the University of California Data Dryad site: DOI: 10.5061/dryad.3bk3j9ktm.

a shallow ontological classification of all the actants and actions appearing in Kristensen's legend collection while also supporting an understanding of repertoire and classifying tellers according to age, education, employment and gender, thereby capturing relationships across the classes (Tangherlini 1994; 2013a). Building on this initial work, our team devised a network classifier that allowed a researcher to find groups of stories according to clustering the network based on different network modes, thereby generating different groupings of the corpus-based not only on Kristensen's existing classifiers, but also on the shallow ontology previously described, as well as aspects of the storyteller's and their biographical data, dependent on the research questions of the end user (Abello et al. 2012). This multi-modal classifier was successful at discovering latent patterns in the underlying corpus, and thus surfacing aspects of similarity within the corpus otherwise occluded by the one class / one item approach of the earliest classification schemes. Additional methods of classification can take advantage of advances in natural language processing, allowing the texts themselves to be organized according to latent semantic patterns in the texts; in a certain sense, this allows the stories to be in dialogue with one another, where semantic similarity becomes an organizing principle. These patterns, in turn, can form the basis for a connection between texts and, by extension, an additional method for classification. It is important to recognize that no one classification system will be sufficient to answer all research questions; the goal, however, is to provide multiple inroads into a collection that provides a researcher with methods for, at the very least, (a) discovering patterns in the corpus that can form the basis for additional analysis and contextualization and (b) finding sub groupings of stories that have a degree of similarity with one or several target stories in which the researcher is interested. Among the most successful methods for search and discovery in large, unstructured text corpora that go beyond the obvious limitations of simple Boolean key word searches are those that are broadly categorized as 'topic modeling.' The earliest models, such as latent semantic indexing or analysis (LSA), were useful for finding similarities between documents in a specific document space, effectively increasing recall for a given search when compared to Boolean keyword search (Deerwester et al. 1990). Despite the success of this method, the well-documented problem of over-fitting and the need for recalculation with the addition of new documents to the corpus led to the development of probabilistic and generative topic modeling approaches, the most well-known being Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) (Blei et al. 2003). LDA, unlike LSA, allowed for a rapid association of new documents to the topic space and, over the years, has been refined to work easily with multiple languages and present a consistent, interpretable hierarchical topic space. It is worth noting that, in this context, 'topic' should not be understood as 'thematic concepts,' an idea which in any event may not be particularly salient in the context of a collection of folk legends, but rather as shared semantic spaces, a more productive method for grouping stories for most folklore research tasks. Despite the advantages of LDA over LSA, it has several shortcomings, not least a difficulty of interpretability (Shadrova 2021). These problems have been mitigated considerably by recent advances based on deep learning models for natural language processing tasks. In this study, we

make use of BERTopic for discovering a latent topic space in Thiele's *Danmarks folkesagn* (Thiele 1843 [1968]; Grootendorst 2022).

## Data and Methods

Our first challenge was to create a digital version of *Danmarks folkesagn*. The original version was printed with an older orthography (e.g. aa instead of å) and was set using a blackletter typeface, features which made a straightforward digitization of the collection difficult. We ultimately constructed a hybrid, clean version of the collection optimized for use in a topic modeling and classification pipeline described below by incorporating aspects of the more recent printing of the collection, allowing us to generate texts with modern orthography but retaining many of the earlier formulations of the original. Because the legends in the collection are of unequal length, we chunked them into chunks of nearly equal length so that the discovery of topics would rest on texts of more or less similar size. Other work in computational literary studies supports the observation that paragraphs or paragraph-sized 'chunks' from a larger work can be represented by a small number of topics, thus allowing for a more precise alignment of the document space with the latent semantic space of the target corpus (Tangherlini and Leonard 2013; Algee-Hewitt et al. 2015). We developed a variable chunking algorithm given the range of lengths of the legends in the collection that allowed for very short legends to remain unchunked while also splitting the majority of legends into chunks of between fifty and seventy-five tokens, tokenizing on word separations (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Total number of stories | 901 |
| Total number of chunks | 2597 |
| Range of chunk lengths | 21 to 80 |
| Average chunk length | 62.41 tokens |
| Maximum number of chunks for a story | 17 |
| Number of stories with only 1 chunk | 152 |
| Shortest story length | 21 tokens |
| Longest story length | 1245 tokens |
| Average story length | 181.21 tokens |

The majority of the 901 legends in the collection grouped around the 150–200 token size, a finding that aligns well with the length of legends in Kristensen's later collections (Figure 1).

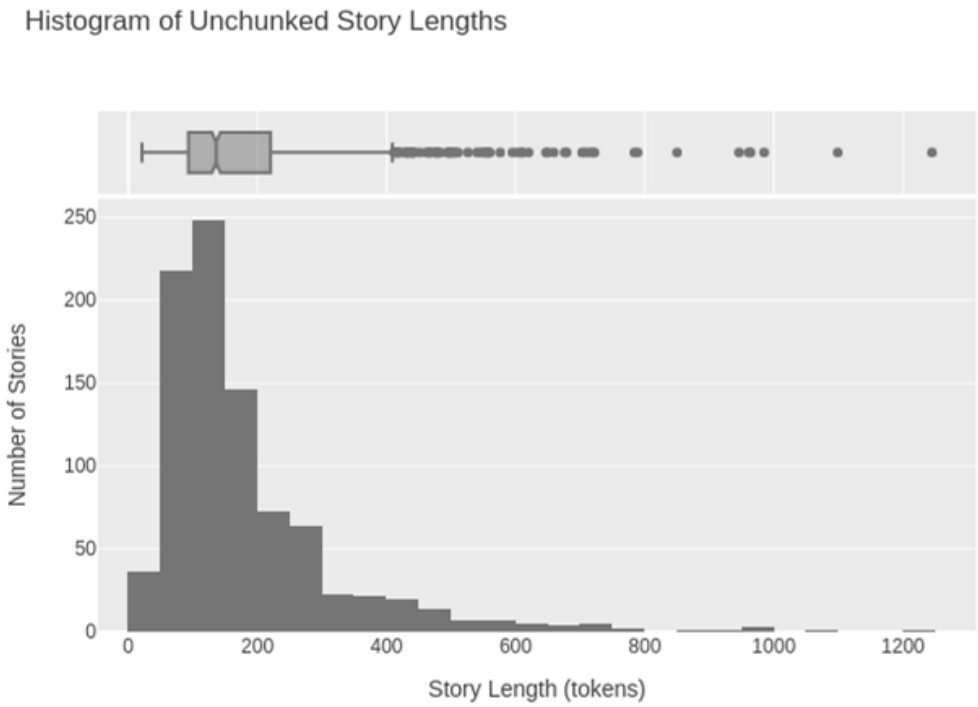


Figure 1. Length of stories in Thiele's *Danmarks folkesagn*, measured in tokens, and binned into groups of 50 tokens. Across the top, a simple box plot showing the main range and concentration of story lengths.

As part of the chunking process, we maintained the order of the chunks and their association with the original story identification, the story's title and its location in the overall collection mapped to volume, section, and class. For the stories in the section on supernatural creatures (*troldfolk*), we also kept track of the subsection.[2]

The collection was then modeled using BERTopic, a transformer-based large language model approach to mapping the corpus to a high dimensional, context-aware language space (Grootendorst 2022). The underlying language model is pretrained to operate with SentenceBERT, a modification of the standard BERT model that operates well with sentences and phrases (Reimers and Gurevych 2019). Importantly, we use a SentenceBERT model specifically created for nineteenth-century Danish literature (Enevoldsen 2023).[3] For dimensionality reduction of the embedding space, we used the default UMAP method and set the two main parameters as n_neighbors=5 and n_components=5. The n_neighbors parameter sets the size of the local neighborhood for

[2] See the supplemental materials on github for a csv version of the dataframe on which subsequent analyses were made https://tango2.github.io/thiele_supp/.

[3] We evaluated this model against the default multilingual model by asking two native Danish speakers to evaluate the interpretability of the labels generated by two different methods. Although the default method occasionally received higher score, the annotators agreed that the overall interpretability of the nineteenth century model was better than the default model.

learning the structure of the manifold (low numbers=increasing local focus), and the n_components parameter sets the dimensionality of the low dimensional manifold space.[4] The n_neighbors parameter tends to be quite sensitive for very small corpuses such as *Danmarks folkesagn*, and a higher number can make the clustering step fail. Consequently, we also set the min_dist parameter to zero to encourage clustering. To find clusters, we make use of the default clustering algorithm, HDBScan, a density-based clustering algorithm that works well with UMAP. The ensuing clusters are based on semantic similarity of the embedded text vectors projected onto the manifold learned by UMAP. To ensure that we do not wind up with many small clusters, we expand the size of potential clusters by instructing HDBScan to only construct clusters of a minimum of ten 'chunks.' Because we do not force documents into clusters, we are left with many documents that could belong to several clusters—we use an assignment step that places these 'outlier' documents into their most likely cluster based on an evaluation of the words in the chunks when compared to the words in the clusters. Once the outliers are assigned to clusters, we then generate labels for those clusters, but remove stop words from the possible labels. To ensure interpretability, we use two methods to calculate labels. In the first approach, class-based term-frequency inverse document-frequency (cTFIDF), we treat each of the clusters as a document and the collection of clusters as the corpus, and select the highest ranked words (minus stop words) as the cluster label. The other method, Maximal Marginal Relevance, balances diversity of possible label words with relevance to create a set of labels. In general, our annotators favored the cTFIDF labels, although we provide both sets here. We then created various visualizations as a means for exploring the topic space, having labeled each of the documents with the title of the tale from which they were derived, thereby allowing tales to have multiple topic assignments.[5]

The topic models provide a novel view into the collection based on a context-aware semantic similarity between the story chunks, and thus provide a separate classification of the collection. In a subsequent step, we extend this classification to create a network representation of the corpus, which can facilitate navigation of the overall corpus space and allow one to discover paths through the corpus that are based on semantic similarities that cross the boundaries of the pre-existing classification space. To create the network representation, we conceptualize the legend-to-topic assignments as a bipartite graph, with legends constituting one mode of the network, and topics the other mode. We first reassemble the legends from their chunks, but now keep track of their topic assignments. Using NetworkX, a simple network package for Python, we construct the bipartite graph where edges are based on the assignment between chunk and topic; when we reassemble the legends from their chunks, we add the probability of the assignments as edge weights, so that a legend L that has two chunks assigned to topic $T_A$ with probability 1 and 0.8, and one chunk assigned to topic $T_B$ with probability 0.5, would have edges L- $T_A$ with weight 1.8, and L- $T_B$ with weight 0.5 or, in edge set

[4] For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, n_components=5 is optimal for this type of problem.

[5] Code for this work is available on the github repository for this project https://github.com/tango2/thiele_bert-classifier.

notation, $E=\{(L, T_A,1.8),(L, T_B,0.5)\}$. We subject this graph to various decompositions that allow us to see the topic-story clusters in different ways. Since each of the stories retains its original classification, we can also find subgroups of stories that either defy earlier classifications or that create subgroupings within a preexisting classification.

A weighted bipartite graph also allows us to create a projection of the graph onto a single mode. In our work, we project the graph onto the legends, where the topics with their accompanying weights become the edges. Although this process produces a seemingly intractable hairball given the combinatory explosion that results from this projection, several methods for disentangling the hairball exist (Abello et al. 2023). Here, we present two very simple approaches for working with this hairball. The first approach relies on finding the maximum spanning tree for the network (we deploy both the Kruskal and Prim algorithms), which provide interesting insight into the highest weighted (and thus highest probability) tree that connects all the stories in the corpus. The second approach relies on finding high weight paths from a story chosen by the researcher to any other story chosen by the researcher. We present an example of one such pathfinding task to illustrate how traversing a network, much like traveling along a road through an ever-changing landscape, can provide insight into the connections between regions (topics) and landmarks (stories).

**Results and Discussion**

The topic modeling step results in the identification of forty-four topics, with several topics associated with many legends (Table 2).

Although reading through the topic labels can be informative, understanding the relationships between the topics as well as the association between topics and particular stories is an even more productive endeavor. For example, while Thiele lists 110 legends under the rubric of "Place legends—churches and monasteries," the association of topic 0 "church, place, built, tower" with 215 discrete legends illustrates how the topic modeling method dramatically increases the number of legends of potential interest for a researcher interested in legends focused on churches. The modeling approach also surfaces an interesting phenomenon, namely the much broader emphasis on churches in the overall collection.

Similarly, 197 legends, or nearly one fifth of the entire collection, are associated with topic 1, "the minister, the king, came, last, stood," which suggests a much broader penetration of priests, religion and considerations of class into the legendary landscape than Thiele's classification could possibly capture with his system, perhaps indicating that these ideas form a narrative backdrop for early nineteenth-century Danish storytelling, capturing the social concerns expressed by the storytellers, something to which Thiele seems to have been impressively oblivious (Tangherlini 2022, 73). Indeed, an ego-network consisting of the first neighbors of topic 1 shows that these legends appear in all of Thiele's various classes and subclasses, except for legends about holy springs (Figure 2a). Intriguingly, the holy spring legends are captured by a subnetwork of twenty distinct topics (Figure 2b).

**Table 2. The topics discovered by BERTopic, and the two sets of labels generated for each topic**

| Topic | # docs | cTFIDF label | MMR label |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 289 | kirke_kirken_bygget_sted | sted_kirkegård_står_tårnet |
| 1 | 294 | præsten_kongen_komme_sidst | præsten_kongen_sidst_stod |
| 2 | 212 | byen_hus_hørte_først | hus_først_stor_vognen |
| 3 | 80 | skibet_holger_gange_gang | skibet_gange_lod_næppe |
| 4 | 105 | høj_sten_navn_gård | høj_gård_sted_stor |
| 5 | 73 | ni_daae_rotter_enige | rotter_enige_siden_præst |
| 6 | 120 | falster_præsten_henrik_hat | falster_røveren_lige_bort |
| 7 | 88 | gud_manden_måle_jesu | manden_stod_mand_øl |
| 8 | 63 | høj_spor_mark_pedersborg | mark_pedersborg_mellem_skov |
| 9 | 88 | drengen_hvile_nissen_trak | trak_satte_bare_næste |
| 10 | 57 | gården_gårdens_skoven_fyn | gårdens_skoven_fyn_penge |
| 11 | 59 | gammel_gård_navn_boede | gammel_boede_nærheden_altret |
| 12 | 51 | død_nat_fornem_derhen | død_nat_blevet_besvær |
| 13 | 63 | pigen_pige_pigerne_køkkenet | pigen_gården_kniv_fortalte |
| 14 | 63 | fanden_fandt_svin_begyndte | fandt_kobberkedel_øjeblik_husmand en |
| 15 | 40 | får_samtidig_rok_komme | gravet_først_væggen_lykkedes |
| 16 | 54 | barnet_barn_syn_præsten | barnet_barn_hændte_fader |
| 17 | 58 | bonden_bonde_bondens_trolden | bonden_mads_tage_stod |
| 18 | 41 | svenskerne_sum_svenske_landet | svenskerne_landet_sum penge_flygtede |
| 19 | 45 | kusken_død_døden_gud | kusken_død_liv_herre |
| 20 | 38 | jager_år_viser_sagn | sagn_sørøvere_blevet_ulykke |
| 21 | 32 | store_fingre_sten_karle | store_penge_voksede_svenskerne |
| 22 | 35 | bad_således_vosborg_hest | således_vosborg_land_kejserlige |
| 23 | 33 | kilde_mark_mil_fortælles | fortælles_bærer_siges_vand |
| 24 | 25 | fjorden_fjord_limfjorden_tæt | fjorden_herregården_havet_rodede |
| 25 | 42 | slot_slottet_hundrede_nattetid | slot_nattetid_herremand_gamle |
| 26 | 30 | tjeneren_tolv_hvordan_lov | tolv_hvordan_svær_svende |
| 27 | 35 | hjælpe_følge_godt_kongen | kongen_vilje_højen_knap |
| 28 | 28 | bor_bjergmand_pæl_børn | bjergmand_pæl_høre_kister |
| 29 | 25 | sæk_frelst_løfte_anders | anders_skib_mølleren_undervejs |
| 30 | 19 | skib_danske_kone_bygning | bygning_spøgelset_god forståelse_thy |
| 31 | 18 | moder_klostret_krig_danmark | moder_krig_danmark_endog |
| 32 | 26 | christian_frederik_prins_kong christian | frederik_kong_christian fjerde_gjort |
| 33 | 31 | røverne_røvere_fange_hulen | røverne_hulen_spændt_overfaldet |
| 34 | 24 | gode_bedste_hoppen_peter | bedste_hoppen_fattige_fundet |
| 35 | 18 | vest_mil_herregården_to mil | vest_herregården_to mil_sogn |
| 36 | 29 | vandet_lindormen_vand_nis | vandet_lindormen_glemte_land |
| 37 | 20 | hvert år_hvert_åen_godt | hvert år_passe_menneske_sker |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 38 | 23 | musik_hest_dans_ride | musik_hest_ride_lystighed |
| 39 | 23 | sø_sten_hedder_ringkøbing | sten_hedder_ringkøbing_stranden |
| 40 | 34 | biskop_fru mette_mette_vidt | biskop_fru mette_sidste_tjeneste |
| 41 | 18 | ringsted_stjal_ringen_bjergfolk | ringsted_bjergfolk_højen_stjæle |
| 42 | 32 | lov_jage_nat_straf | straf_stalden_ride_fangenskab |
| 43 | 16 | lad_giv_guld_lægge | lægge_sko_enge_tage |

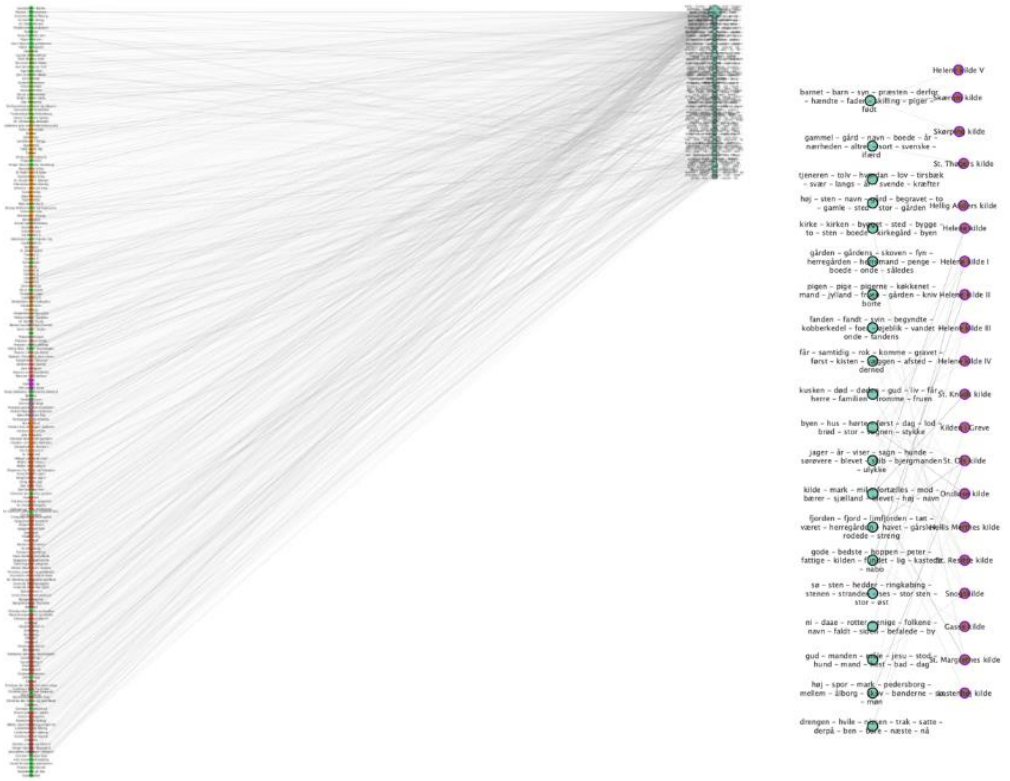

Figure 2. (a) On the left, a bipartite layout for the ego-network representation of topic 1, "the minister, the king, came, last, stood" expanded to include the first topic neighbors of all the associated legends. Note that the topic space of 44 topics is fully covered by this selection of legends (b) a selection of all the legends classified by Thiele as "holy springs," and their associated topics. Note that not all the legends in Thiele's class are captured by the very fine-grained topic, "spring, mile, field, told, carries, said, water."

BERTopic allows for the creation of numerous visualizations that make the process of interrogating the relationship between topics and their constituent stories easier. In the following visualizations, we have provided the title of the story or the location of the story in the collection represented as [volume]_[section]_[subsection] as a simple navigational aid to return to the story in Thiele's collection, thereby allowing for a

macroscopic engagement with the overall collection space (Tangherlini 2013b).[6] A simple intertopic distance map viewer, for instance, highlights the groupings of topics, and their interrelationship, allowing for an intuitive interface for exploring topic similarities (Figure 3).

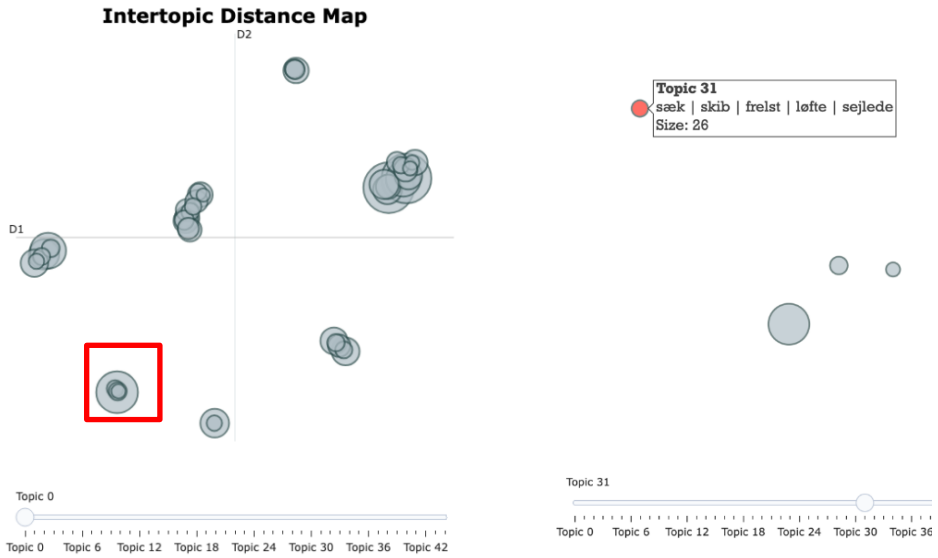
Intertopic Distance Map
D2
D1
Topic 31
sæk | skib | frelst | løfte | sejlede
Size: 26
Topic 0
Topic 0 Topic 6 Topic 12 Topic 18 Topic 24 Topic 30 Topic 36 Topic 42
Topic 31
Topic 0 Topic 6 Topic 12 Topic 18 Topic 24 Topic 30 Topic 36

Figure 3. (a) The intertopic distance map visualizer, showing the overall topic space, where distance between topics is measured using a cosine similarity metric, and size captures the number of associated legend chunks. Topics that share a great deal of semantic similarity are presented close to one another in this 2-D representation of the clustered 5-D space (b) A close-up of one of the groupings of topics highlighted on the left, with topic 31 selected showing its label and the number of associated chunks.

Visualizing the space as a dendrogram provides even greater insight into the relationship between topics and provides a hierarchical representation of the overall topic space (Figure 4).

While the topic space maps and visualizations provide insight into the overall semantic space of the collection, as well as the fine-grained relationships between the topics, a network representation based on the relationship between stories and their associated topics offers an alternative classification and, more importantly, a new method for traversing the collection. If we were to only associate topics with stories, we would, as with Thiele's and most other folklore classification methods, be presented with a series of disconnected network components, each one a star with a topic in the center, and associated stories on the periphery. By chunking the legends, however, and using a probabilistic assignment of story chunks to topics as described in our methods, we create a weighted bipartite graph, where legends represent one mode of the graph and topics the other mode. This graph can then be clustered into communities based on

[6] We include interactive versions of most of the figures in this article in our supplementary material on github.

weightings of the edges as noted above, which allows for a much more focused investigation of the topic-legend associations, as well as a novel method for grouping the legends based on semantic similarity, as opposed to the shared indexical features/events method initially used by Thiele (Figure 5).

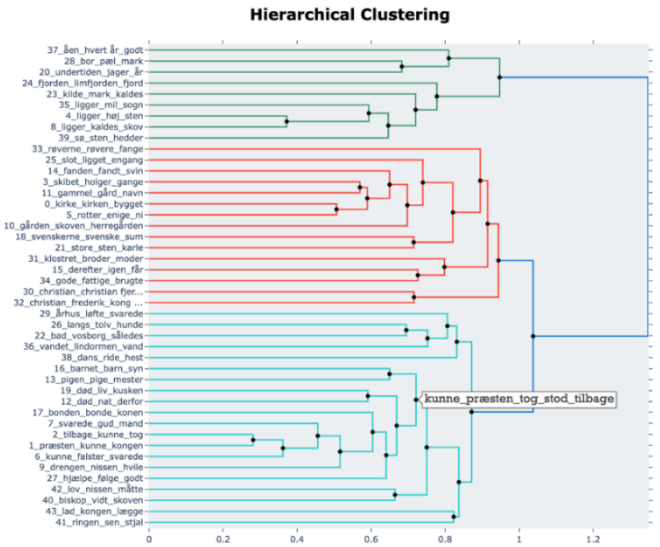


Figure 4. A dendrogram visualization of the topic space, offering an alternative hierarchical representation of the collection that can supplement Thiele's initial classification. Here, one of the nodes higher in the hierarchy is highlighted, labeled with the highest ranked terms from the leaf nodes, capturing the relationship between ministers and ghosts, including those of dead children.

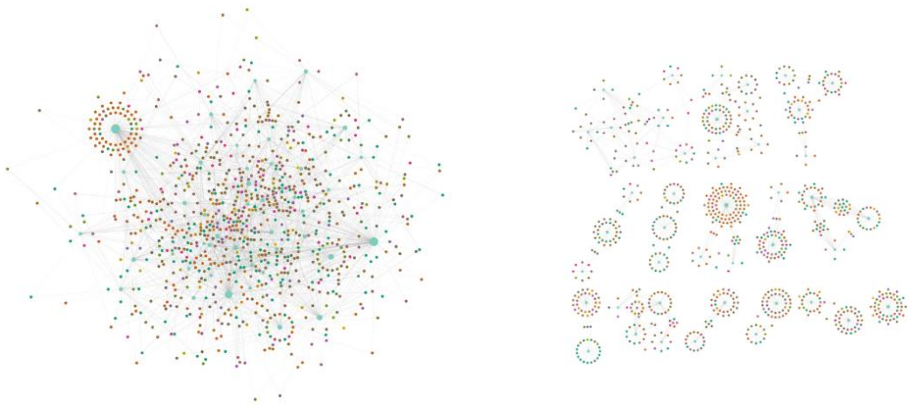

Figure 5. (a) Left: The unclustered bipartite graph, using a spring embedded layout algorithm. The larger topic nodes (sized by degree) are at the center of most stars (light green), while the stories are represented by smaller nodes—the color of the node represents its Thiele class-subclass label, while the outer ring is the Thiele division (four main divisions).
(b) Right: A clustered version of the same graph, using a fast-greedy modularity-based clustering algorithm (Girvan and Newman 2002).

Exploring the clustered bipartite graph reveals an interesting grouping of legends that brings together legends that include spatial topics such as fjords (topic 24); castles (topic 25); helpful kings and farmhands (topic 27); robbers (topic 33); hired girls and kitchens (topic 13); babies, priests, revenants and birth (topic 16); and hunting, *nisser* and barns (topic 42), covering in all seventy-four stories representing stories from both volumes and twelve of Thiele's subdivisions (Figure 6).

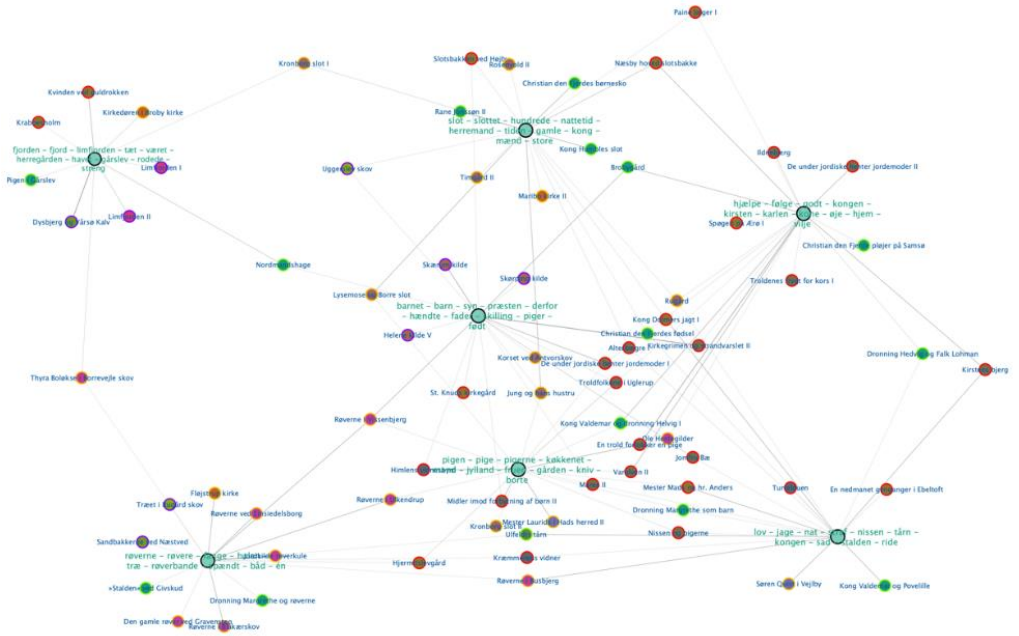
slot – slottet – hundrede – nattetid – herremand – tid – gamle – kong – mænd – store
barnet – barn – syv – ærasten – derfor – hændte – fader – kulling – piger – født
pigen – pige – pigerne – køkkenet – borte
hjælpe – følge – nødt – kongen – karsten – karlen – ske – øje – hjem – vilje
lov – jage – nat – nat – nissen – tårn – kongen – stalden – ride
røverne – røvere – røvet – halvtolvskarlene – træ – røverbande – sandt – båd – en

Figure 6. A close-up of one of the legend-topic clusters from the bipartite graph. Topics are labeled with their top ten words, and stories are labeled with their title. While some stories have a single association to a topic, such as "En nedmanet genganger i Ebeltoft" [A conjured revenant in Ebeltoft], others, such as "Røverne i Vissenbjerg" [The Robbers in Vissenbjerg], play a bridging function between topics.

A final method for exploring the network graph based on the legend-topic assignments is through a projection onto a story-story network. Although the network presents as an intractable hairball because of the combinatory explosion in the number of edges caused by the projection, there is a great deal of information encoded in the network. A maximal spanning tree as described above provides an overview of the important (or most heavily weighted) connections between stories, where the connections are based on the topic space (Figure 7). Such a tree presents a different view of the network than the clustered bipartite graph, as the goal of the spanning tree is to be able to reach every point on the graph from any arbitrarily selected point. In short, given a story, one can find a path to any other story. By paying attention to the edges, which here are topics, and the Thiele classification of the stories along the path, one can create a semantically informed link between these stories. Such a path might, in turn, capture the culturally

and linguistically sensitive connections that tradition participants likely made in their own understanding of the tradition space. At the same time, looking at both high degree stories (those with connections to many other stories) or stories with high betweenness measures (those that, if one deletes them, the graph fragments), might help us identify stories that deserve further interrogation.

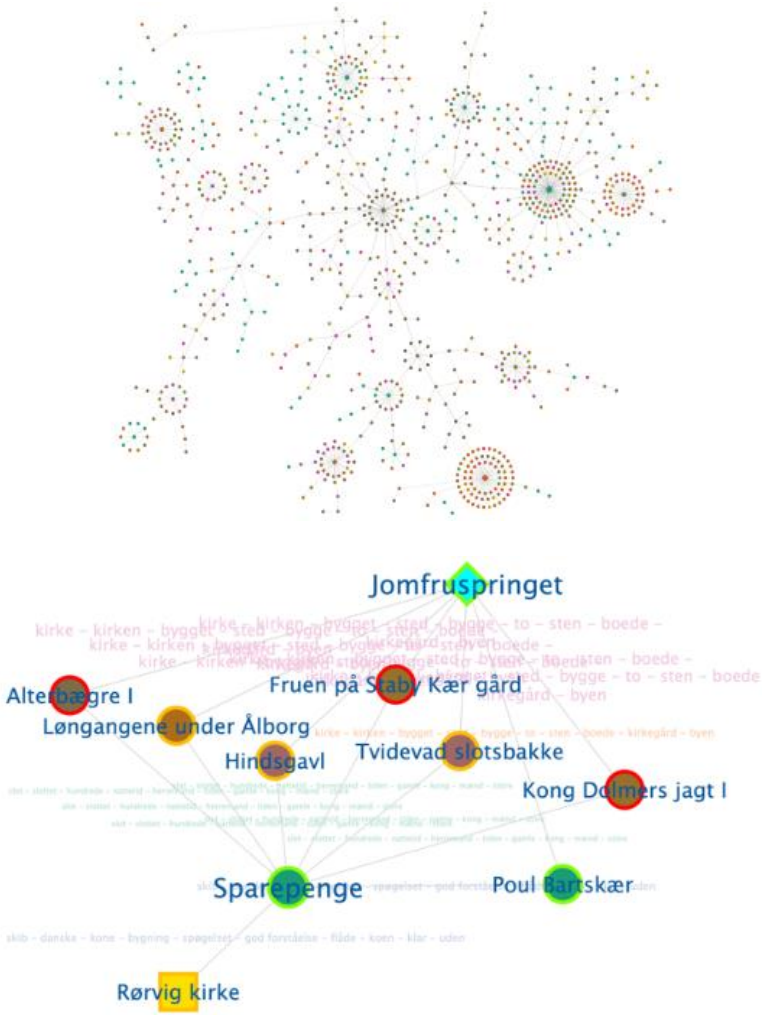


Figure 7. (a) A maximal spanning tree, created using Kruskal's algorithm and making use of edge weights. The tree covers all the legends and connects them with their highest weighted edge. A story, such as "Skatten i Sortenshave" is identified as having very high degree in this network representation, identifying it as a target for additional investigation. (b) six possible high weight paths from the story "Jomfruspringet" [Maiden leap] to the story "Rørvig Kirke" [Rørvig church].

A final complementary approach is to choose a starting point in the network and a target story—perhaps two stories that have been identified in an earlier step in the topic

modeling exploration process. Along the path, one will follow edges associated with the highest weight topics, and pass through other stories along the way, providing a conceptually informed path from the original story to the target story, thereby capturing a series of possible paths to get from one story to another. This approach provides a semantically based analog to the repertoire-based reading explored in informant-centered approaches to legend collections (Palmenfelt 1993; Tangherlini 1994).

## Conclusion

The approaches to classification presented here are intended to supplement our current methods for navigating large, complicated folklore collections. The original ordering of collections, as Gunnell has pointed out, often reflected the ideological and intellectual goals of the collectors (Gunnell 2022). Rather than rely on preexisting classification structures, the deep learning methods presented here allow the texts—and perhaps by extension, the storytellers—to arrange themselves according to semantic similarities and other dimensions of classification. By opening the collections in this manner, we discover new paths through the collections and the landscapes of belief encoded within them (Gunnell 2008). The investigations presented here are preliminary, but they gesture toward potentially new ways to work not only within collections but also across collections. There is nothing that fundamentally prevents the application of these methods to multilingual collections. For example, with appropriate resources—both computational and corpus-based—one could imagine training a Nordic SentenceBert model, particularly fine-tuned to the dialects and regional speech of the largely rural populations whose expressions the nineteenth and early twentieth-century ethnographic collections are largely comprised. The digital collections *Sagnagrunnur*, *SAMLA* and *FOLKE* all, for example, represent enormous amounts of folkloric material and, along with the Thiele and Kristensen collections for Denmark, present an exciting opportunity to develop a pan-Nordic approach to discovery and exploration (Gunnell 2010; Tangherlini 2013a; Kverndokk 2022; Skott 2022). Integrating these approaches to classification with the considerable work in geo-coding, alignment with informant and collector information, and other contextual resources will allow future scholars to work seamlessly across traditions, and to move that much closer to understanding why these stories were told and the possible impacts they had on tellers and listeners alike. At the very least, they will break our collections out of classificatory straight-jackets and provide multiple routes of ongoing discovery.

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# THE FOLKLORE OF RESEARCH AND THE REALITY OF LOCAL FOLKLORE

Éva Pócs*

This brief account is a preliminary outline of two chapters of a book I am writing based on research carried out in a Hungarian-speaking Roman Catholic village. Between 2002 and 2016, I carried out fieldwork (amounting to a total of eight months) at Gyimesközéplok.[1] The main goal of my research was to explore the role that aspects of ilived religion and the related beliefs played in everyday life, everyday religiosity, personal faith and religious life strategies.

During my fieldwork, I encountered textual representations of folk beliefs and lived, vernacular religion that simultaneously reflected the impact of the concepts and research categories of folklore as they had developed over the course of the nineteenth century as well as the long-standing influence of written culture, the church and the clergy and the impact of folklore collectors who had visited the region over the last 50 years and of local folklore publications, and the effects of religious resilience on sustaining 'old' folklore phenomena. During the 14 years of my fieldwork, I was able to register the rapid changes of the past two decades: the gradual extinction of non-Christian belief figures and related narratives; and the way in which speech situations for talking about belief figures and non-Christian demons grew rarer or vanished altogether. The changes in religious life were less spectacular, but especially as the oldest age group died out, the intensity of individual worship and the practice of private rites declined sharply. Despite these trends, narratives reflecting living faith still survive, mainly in themes reinforced and retained by official religion, and there has been a noticeable increase in interest in local folklore and the emergence of created and recreated folklore. Thus, the

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[1] Gyimesközéplok is one of the villages of the so-called Gyimes (Ghimeş) region, in Băcau County, Romania; at one of the easternmost points of the Hungarian-speaking area, in the region neighbouring Romanian-speaking Greek Catholic/Orthodox communities. In 2002, I carried out the bulk of my research in a part of the village called Hidegség-pataka with about 2,200 inhabitants.

folklore I got to know in the course of my research is simultaneously the representation of certain traditional phenomena and 'created' folklore.

**Preceding Scholarship, My Expectations**

During my research my conceptualisations of folklore and folk religion gained new dimensions, and, viewed from the point of view of the role that local religion and beliefs play in individual religion and beliefs in everyday life they constituted a complete refutation of the fallacies of the folklore studies of the previous 150–200 years: a truncated, incomplete, false picture of folklore created by researchers and collectors, and of a religiosity examined from above, from the vantage point of official religion. The flawed picture that emerged in this misguided manner was an 'invented tradition' created by nineteenth- to twentieth-century research, characterised by several erroneous reductions. The first ethnographers were exploring folk culture primarily as a system that lived via the oral tradition of the peasantry, which was supposed to be an autonomous entity independent of elite culture and its literacy, where vernacular religion was studied, if at all, from the point of view of official religion. Little attention was paid to the functions of religion, individual religiosity and questions of faith. The folk belief tradition was studied as a system separate from the whole of spiritual culture, independent of religion, almost as a counter pole to religion, as 'superstition.'

Furthermore, early folklore studies heavily focused on texts. Textual manifestations of popular religion and folk belief came to the fore, which inevitably forced the ideas and phenomena of religion and belief into the etic text genre categories (legend, prayer, parable etc.) developed by folkloristics/folklore studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which were by no means identical with them, but only, at best, a kind of representation.

It was in the spirit of these guiding principles that researchers have shaped their collections, publications or archives and this is the legacy we are carrying forth to this day. It was mostly these genres, defined by scholarship, that researchers whether professional or self-taught, sought and found; while far less attention was paid to texts that did not correspond to any of the pre-determined generic categories: to semi-folkloristic, written categories, to texts that appeared fragmented or incomplete; too vague, overlapping or unnamed categories, etc.

By the middle of the twentieth century, some of these misguided practices were recognised and efforts began to promote the renewal of folklore studies and to introduce new considerations in studying vernacular religion. We were continually witnessing an ongoing rejuvenation of folklore studies and the study of religion, of the emergence of new points of view and research categories.[2] Nonetheless, in the course of my work, I

[2] I have no room to even mention the history of the renewal of genre categories, the relationship between religious tradition and folklore genres, or between text and religious faith/folk belief, or the vast literature of new genre analyses, the emergence of categories (e.g. belief legends) not previously considered, the 'performer-centered' studies, and the new intertextual approaches. Some of the most important milestones of these processes for me: Honko 1962; 1964; 1968; Pentikäinen 1970; Dégh and Vázsonyi 1976; Dégh 1995; Ohrvik and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2015. The situation is similar with

was forced to acknowledge the influence of these precedents on all contemporary research (including my own). This is how juxtaposing old and new categories became one of the strands of my research. Here I present the lessons I learnt and the conclusions I have drawn in this context, illustrated by some examples.

**The Field in Gyimesközéplok, Hidegség**

It was under the influence of the above research principles and based on collections of belief legends, prayers and charms, that an idealised picture of the culture of the Gyimes region emerged among scholars and the general public alike. It claimed that communities in the Gyimes region still retained the survivals of a coherent and comprehensive medieval or possibly even more ancient 'archaic' worldview. It was partly due to this that the communities of the villages of Gyimes have become the focus of most recent folklore studies both by professional and amateur researchers. My vision of the religion and beliefs of the people of Hidegség was inevitably influenced by the research done before me and the resulting publications. My first, preliminary goal was also to collect and analyse the traditions of the past. My research hypothesis, similar to others, is concerned with finding a narrowly circumscribed textual system discernible from previous publications of legends. Although unaware, the vista emerging from the legends and belief legends collected by previous folklore researchers from good narrators and published without any context became my point of departure. I soon had to realise, partly, that none of this was an authentic picture of the textual representations of the beliefs and religious life of Hidegség, and partly that even the exploration of the most authentic textual representations can only reveal a very small segment of the reality of the religious life and belief world of these people. The world of personal religiosity and faith in fact includes far more than the ideas and phenomena manifested in legend-like texts. Eventually, my primary objective became exploring the role of religion in everyday life – a religiosity in which the surviving ideas and rituals of the folk belief tradition form an integral and inseparable part.

**The Fieldwork Situation – Motivations of the Informant**

During my stays at Hidegség, I tried to attend public rituals, masses, community festivals, funerals, christenings etc., but as a researcher coming from the outside, I could very rarely take part in manifestations of everyday religiosity and private rites; rather I could mostly access these through verbal narrative accounts. When it came to those aspects of beliefs that were regarded negatively and were prohibited or concealed, I only

the refutation of the artificial division of popular and elite culture, with the study of the interactions between the two, and with the admission of the 'shared' genres into the canon, to which processes anthropology, historiography and literary studies also contributed greatly: e.g. Le Goff 1967; Burke 1978; Gurevich 1992. Perhaps the most important guidance for me was provided by those researchers who began to examine lived religion based on fieldwork, from the perspective of the practitioners, in the second half of the twentieth century. Cf. for example Badone 1990; Stewart 1991; Bowman 2003–2004; Valk 2008; Bowman and Valk 2012; Primiano 2012; Kapaló 2013.

ever gained access to these through day-to-day conversations or gossip (particularly characteristic areas included bewitching and its resolution, resorting to Romanian monks to causing and undoing harm or healing through ordeal procedures, visiting cunning men/women and fortune tellers who can affect or resolve love magic). For these reasons, one of my main methodological questions was how we could decipher – from texts uttered in interview situations (and in everyday conversations) in the field – the role of religion in everyday life and in life strategies and the questions of faith and doubt. During this process, I could also observe how the collecting situation itself and the presence of the collector (myself included) generate a new kind of 'created' textual world. In these situations, informants rarely offered texts that corresponded to any of the traditional generic categories in response to our questions concerning their beliefs or religious life. If there were such stories in circulation at all, these were usually modified by the informants' motivations.

The actualising character of the situation, the speech context, the way in which the text was constructed, the surrounding discourse, faith dispute and testimonies led me to decide whether in any particular case, we were talking about a religious fact, a belief or mere text. People would tell their stories sometimes with a legitimising intention, as testimony, proof, a way of consolidation of their faith, but also, on other occasions, as a refutation of faith. The stories shared were often accompanied by comments or excuses addressed to the collector, and the attribution of these 'superstitions' to others (e.g. Romanians) or to past times.

I have also collected numerous examples of the same story fulfilling several communicational functions simultaneously – it could carry a different meaning in different speech situations. Thus, for instance, a 'pretty' story of the fairy feasts of *szépasszony* told for entertainment on one occasion, in a subsequent speech situation, turns into a narrative of believed and feared demons when the horror of the numinous appears, even if related by the same informant.

**The Collecting Situation – The Collector's Impact**

Important factors that shape the emergence of the 'new' textual world in the collecting situation are *testimonies or discourses* concerning *faith/doubt/faithlessness*, usually relating to the mythical figures of the Christian faith or the almost extinct figures of folk belief, in the context of stories about them and their deeds. The narrators would often involve the collector himself or herself in these stories and force them to confess to their own beliefs. On such occasions, both scientific and religious evidence, corroborations and refutations were brought up, for example in the form of recalling the priest's opinions, perhaps his words of chastisement about beliefs were alluded to, parables heard in sermons or quotations of edifying reading material were cited. All of this naturally entailed the modification or dissolution of the traditional texts (if such had ever existed in the background), and one witnessed the dissolution of traditional, rigid generic categories.

The following is an extract from a *szépasszony* (an ill-willed rather than benevolent demon appearing in the shape of a beautiful woman) 'dispute' involving three participants.

*And the* szépasszony*? Who were they?*

I don't know that.

*What had you heard about them?*

I'd heard that they were riding on top of a hemp breaker, but who knows?

*And what did people say about them, what were their stories?*

Old Mrs János Fülöp said that there were these *szépasszony*, these witches, but then I don't know what they believed in or what… well, I was a small girl, and the old lady said that they said, hip-hop, let me be walking wherever I think of…
[Here she shares a story of a feast in which one of two women gets stuck in a cellar.]
We were little girls, we laughed at it, that's all.
I didn't believe in the *szépasszony*, even though my grandmother and her lot kept talking about them. I didn't believe in them at all.
(F aged 60 and 65)

## Categories of the Textual World

Narratives about the supernatural rarely correspond to the categories of what scholarship calls *belief legends* or their theoretically constructed degrees, the *fabulat, migratory legend, memorat* or *legend,* nor do they usually show their prescribed attributes. In my field experience, the conceptualisation of the folk belief tradition and lived religion mostly appeared in edifying stories and parables, or embedded in information concerning the trivial events of everyday life, into family stories, life stories, news and gossip; as accounts of dreams or visions or as *accounts* told in jest, as negative legends. It was very common for a dialogue conversation to emerge between the collector, the informant and the other listeners. Instead of migratory legends of a fixed structure, except for a very small number of examples, I encountered its variants fragmented by personal experience. The narrator of the following story embedded fragments of the fight against the devil's temptation to commit suicide, a legend known for centuries (Tubach 1969, 22, 251), into a narrative of their own personal experiences.

*Is this the devil's doing?*

The devil, the devil. Well, my father explained this to me, but no one should see who is thinking of this, and then they don't do it in the end, they don't see anything of this. A long while ago my father recounted that someone had gone into the pantry to hang himself. And when they noticed it then they went to save him. And then soldiers with bayonets stood in front of him, so they couldn't go in. They were all the devils, they couldn't go in for fear of those soldiers with bayonets. But not anymore, these things don't happen any longer.
(F aged 72)

The following example is a personal recollection where a woman remembers her father's teachings about the behavioural norms relating to the fiery *lidérc* (something that would be fairly difficult to classify as a *lidérc* legend). *lidérc*/*lüdérc* is a fiery phenomenon that flies in the air, when it descends it turns into a demon in the shape of a man familiar to the woman whom it sexually harasses.

> My father and I were out dredging, we had a fine great pair of oxen, it was moonlight, and we were dredging. And there in front of us was moving something like a fire, and I said, "Father, what kind of thing is that? What is it?" And he said it was a *lüdérc*. And I said, "Do I need to be scared of it?" and "Yes, you can be scared," he said, "but you must pray, and keep crossing yourself, and may the Lord help us and guide it somewhere else." This is how my father spoke when I was a little girl.
>
> *Yes, yes, and what was the lüdérc?*
>
> Well, the *lüdérc* is the devil. This is what my father told me. The *lüdérc* goes about in the image of the devil, and if he manages to drive someone to despair, they will be liberated from the sin they are in.
>
> *Yes, I see.*
>
> Well, this is all I can say.
> (F aged 89)

**Religion and Belief, Elite and Popular**

One of the most important insights gained through my research in Gyimesközéplok was that Catholicism, priests and clerical literacy still played a crucial role in maintaining the so-called traditional belief world (both Christian and non-Christian belief figures and the world of demons). These areas of traditional folk belief live on as parts of religion and with the support of the church as parts of a shared transcendental reality. For instance, the demon figures of folk belief are strongly intertwined with the Christian devil, indeed, the latter plays an important legitimising role. I am thinking of the Catholic church's dogmas on the devil, on possession by the devil and its cleansing rites or the role church sacramentalia and prayers play in averting demons. Christian teachings about notions of another world and belief in the soul living on after death are prevalent in the entire community. This sustaining power is active to this day since we are talking about a still intensely religious community.

Besides the 'dead' textual world of the traditions of the past which are still narrated under certain circumstances today, religious narratives also played a very important normative role among a considerable portion of the population, influencing their mentality and regulating behaviour, during the time of my fieldwork. This role was repeatedly confirmed by stories, mostly as parables, heard or read in church sermons or the media. In the following conversation with the researcher a parable about the temptation of Christ serves to confirm the existence of a non-Christian demon, indeed to make a confession of faith.

> [At midnight she senses an invisible being and] her brain switched right off, she couldn't think, she was just seeing nightmarish things […] something invisible picked her up and put her down on another bed.
>
> *What is it that lifted her up?*
>
> The devil. It wasn't the Lord Jesus that took her up to the top of the church spire, only the devil. That's who had tempted the Lord Jesus. The devil… So that exists, you can see from this.
>
> *Sure, it exists.*
>
> Sure, it exists! You can see it every day, how much the devil is always at work, how wicked he is.
> (F aged 73)

The church also plays an important role in sustaining certain aspects of belief figures and traditional folk beliefs (the dead, the world of spirits that live on after death, life in the other world or the 'devilified' demons of folk belief); those that live on as part of or with the support of religion and constitute parts of a shared transcendental reality.[3]

Contrary to clichéd nineteenth-century conceptualisations of folklore as an oral tradition, at Gyimesközéplok *reading* played a very important role in the transmission of religious narratives. Familiarity with stories of a Christian theme is rooted partly in the reading of religious writings (chapbook legends, Catholic calendars, procession day prayers, 'Mary's messages,' their personal MS prayer books, hand-written booklets that they had written for themselves, etc) and in the practice of telling them to others or reading them out loud in the family circle.

The following example is a story about a possessing devil told on the basis of an earlier reading.

> *And do these evil beings get inside people? Can they get inside them?*
>
> Yes. My daughter has a book now which shows the human heart, like this, and then the head and then it shows you the inside of the heart and how the devil's principles are there in that heart. It shows you a goat, a frog, then a snake, and God only knows what else […] the devil can take the shape of a frog, a goat, a snake, and there were more. Well, and that's how it shows it and in the middle of that heart sits the prince of the devils […]. (F aged 72)

## The Folklore Created by Collectors

While I was occupied with exploring and deciphering the range of local religious ideas and beliefs from the collected texts, which had previously absorbed numerous internal influences, I witnessed a number of new influences that had been generated by contemporary collectors who did research in our present period as well as by the section of the local intelligentsia engaged in trying to re-teach local traditions – including myself

[3] Some works providing important considerations on the changing relationship of Christian religion and superstitions (*superstitio*) and on the 2000-year-old history that continues to this day of the changing relationship to magic and the variable local historical processes concerning this relationship: Thomas 1971, 25–112; Scribner 1993; Beyer 1999; Bailey 2006; Bárth 2020, 236–51.

as a researcher coming from the outside (as well as my fellow researchers from Pécs University and the students involved). Folklore collectors soon discovered the Gyimes region as an ideal field for finding surviving tradition, and besides amateur collections, this led to the publication of several academically valuable publications complete with rich textual material. On the one hand, I am grateful to collectors who came before me since I was able to use their material (for my collection) – on the other hand, I faced the challenge of having to handle the fact that the legacy of their collecting activity and the resulting publications had clearly left their mark on the local community. Thus, for example, Anikó Salamon's system of belief figures (e.g. witch, *szépasszony*) and some of her terminology based on the classification and titles of the Hungarian belief legend catalogue, do in fact diverge from some of what has been my experience. Certain categories, also absent from the catalogues, are noticeably missing from her legend anthology (Salamon 1975, 89–114). The influence of misconstrued or incomplete categories mentioned at the beginning of the article has been and remains active in the minds of contemporary and future collectors and even among the 'educated' informants dedicated to serving the collectors.

The most significant impact of activity by previous collectors by far was that certain frequently collected legends became widely known (again), in other words, local people re-learnt them in these multi-person collecting situations. The narratives related by people of Gyimes came to include, besides a wealth of legends from chapbooks and schoolbooks that had long been present, stories that had been collected there, then read, heard and relearned by the locals. One example is the long-extinct legend of the *vadleány* ('wild girl'), versions of which may be read in Anikó Salamon's book. A copy of this legend anthology was in the possession of one of the inhabitants of Jávárdi-patak and it went from hand to hand along the entire street.

Over the years certain members of the community became star informants favoured by all collectors, after having learnt a great deal in the past 10–20 years about the local folklore and beliefs, as well as about the significance of folklore collecting – they revived and re-learnt the legends that were preferred by folklorists, and they developed certain tactics around collectors.

Since these legend anthologies published texts isolated from their context or went even further and selected what they judged to be complete and 'intact' texts, the legends that became popular in recent years lost their original form, as well as their original speech context and function. (A collection from Gyimesbükk even includes falsified text originally collected by other collectors at other places.) Similarly to the legend *sujets* listed by reference terms in catalogues, the narratives of these 'learnt' legends cannot be considered faithful textual representations of the lived religion and beliefs. What do these narratives reflect instead?

One category of texts that emerged or became modified in the fieldwork situation comprises variants of narratives of traditional demonic beings told for the benefit of the collector as information. In their case, the narrative situation is shaped by the informative intention of the 'research-conscious informant,' who has relatively deep knowledge of the collector's purpose and wishes to provide him/her with information. In these situations, an attitude of distancing from the beliefs under discussion can be

sensed. The aim of transmitting the information is to record the tradition for posterity, mainly for the benefit of the collector who represents in their eyes not only folkloristics, but all other efforts coming from the outside that aim to document the past of the community and, in a way, 'restore it' to them. An ever-higher number of community members see the role of collectors in this light and co-operate willingly in this area (particularly in subject areas in which they receive encouragement from their priest – or possibly from local schoolteachers or even from the media – to promote their traditions or at least there is no reason to fear the priest's chastisement for subscribing to and revealing their superstitious beliefs).

Another important textual category is the brief *informative summary* told to the collector about the most important features and actions of a belief figure that they are asking about – and offered by informants who had learnt a great deal from collectors. This is often nearly identical to the narrative structure known to research as *legend sujet*. Other, 'professional' informants may tell you an entire string of narratives, which will typically include some stories that they had heard or told in previous collections or had re-learned from publications. They actively prompt the collector with the questions to ask, and propose further stories:

> And then you were also asking about the *lidérc.*
>
> *Yes, that would be nice, too.*
>
> Well, that's something I'd seen personally, four times. I've seen a *lidérc* four times. But I had no affair with it, thank God, but my parents told me, my grandparents told me that the *lidérc* was like if someone was in love with a person…
> (M aged 66)

In conclusion, having finished my field research, based on my experiences, I can confirm that the kind of 'traditional,' 'archaic,' coherent belief system which was believed to exist independently of religion and had been constructed by research does not in fact exist. Besides dead and truncated belief texts and genuinely existing 'archaic' survivals, I also found some living beliefs as part of lived religion, intertwined with the peripheral (magical) phenomena of religion. However, no coherent system of traditional legend types about the supernatural emerges from these, nor does my narrative material show any organic connection with the scholarly construct systems we find in legend collections. Neither the belief figures, religious figures, the religious or magical specialists, nor the related beliefs have any fixed and permanent place in a virtual system. We are talking about a mixed, mobile and changing conglomerate, the composition of which varies from one individual to the next, with categories which morph fluidly into each other.

Furthermore, as a result of the above-outlined new tendencies, a significant portion of the religious textual wealth of the community of Gyimesközéplok reflects the characteristics not of local religion, but of our informants' new knowledge about local folklore, the nature of folklorists and the mechanisms of folklore collection. This impact does not manifest itself in religious life or in actual beliefs themselves, but rather on the

level of textual representation. In this sense, it contributes to the further growth and promotion of a false image of the existing textual corpus, of the image of 'invented' folklore brought about by scholarship and, at the same time, to folklore texts being 'channelled' back into traditional, rigid research categories.

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# THE DEAD AND ATMOSPHERIC WATER

Mirjam Mencej*

In his paper "The Power in the Place: Icelandic *Álagablettir* Legends in a Comparative Context," Terry Gunnell discusses narratives about "enchanted/cursed spots" which were not allowed to be harvested or tampered with, or else one would risk "dire consequences." These places, usually situated close to farms, could be a few bushes or a rock, or, more commonly, grassy spots, typically distinct from the landscape (Gunnell 2018, 28). Comparing Icelandic with similar legends from Gaelic and Nordic countries, he argues that "[f]rom the start, many of these sites […] were connected to spirits of the dead, nature spirits or both." As at the time of the arrival of first settlers to Iceland, there were no ancient mounds there, people may have, Terry maintains, "deliberately attempt[ed] to recreate the 'sacred' areas they had known and respected in their old home landscapes […], believing that all farms needed sites which 'belonged' to the 'others' be they the dead, the spirits of the land, or both" (2018, 36–37).

Taking his article as a starting point, I too will in this paper discuss stories that talk of areas that people are not allowed to tamper with without the risk of facing consequences – but in a very different geographic and cultural setting than the one studied by Terry. The stories discussed were audiotaped during my fieldwork on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2016 and 2019 and in 2024, among Catholic Bosnian Croats living in Herzegovina and among Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) from various Bosnian regions. As it turned out, the places these narratives refer to were never related to the spirits of the land but were recognised exclusively as belonging to the dead and identified as (hidden) graves. While the consequences of disturbing graves, in general, may be manifold and are discussed in a variety of narratives (see Mencej 2024), I will in this paper focus on one particular type of consequence that is said to ensue when the dead are disturbed, that is, the appearance of atmospheric water (and the lack thereof): rain, storm, hail (and drought). In addition to disturbing the graves, I will also

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discuss other reasons and circumstances under which atmospheric water may become linked to the dead.

After first giving a brief overview of traditional Slavic vernacular notions and practices that reveal a close connection between the dead and atmospheric water, I will demonstrate that vernacular notions that associate the dead with rain, hail, storms, and also drought, have continued to inform people's understandings of contemporary events, albeit their meaning and function have changed in a different socio-political context.

## The Dead and Atmospheric Water in Slavic Traditional Vernacular Notions

Vernacular ideas about the dead that are in some way connected to atmospheric water – rain, storm or hail, rain-produced floods but also the lack thereof, i.e. drought – were indeed widespread among Slavic peoples. Folklorists and ethnologists who have collected 'folk beliefs' in various Slavic countries, in particular since the nineteenth century, have often come across notions that reveal the close connection between the two. As Slavic scholarly literature often generalises these notions into "people believe that…," it is sometimes difficult to know the exact location and time they were recorded and how widespread they really were, or still are. Nonetheless, the frequency of the reports, coming from various time periods as well as various parts of the territory inhabited by Slavic peoples, testify to the extent of their presence in time and space.

To give but a few examples from rather distant Slavic areas: In the Bela Krajina region in South-Eastern Slovenia, whenever there was a severe storm, people 'believed' that someone had taken their own life (Zupanič 1937–1939, 142, no. 38) whereas near Idrija in North-Western Slovenia they would in such case 'believe' that a person had hanged themselves (Archive of Slovene Ethnographic Museum, 1959). In the village of Godjač, Ukraine, a record from the mid-nineteenth century mentions that inhabitants 'believed' that when one drowns oneself, a storm would immediately follow. In the Volin governorate, they would similarly say that when someone drowned, it started raining (Tolstoj and Tolstaja 1981a; Tolstoj 2003, 83). In the regions around Aleksinac, Resava, Miljkovac and Svrljig in Serbia, it was thought that illegitimate children, thrown into the water or secretly buried somewhere, but also victims of drowning, caused heavy rain (Trojanović 1911, 202; Đorđević 1958, 74; Kajmaković 1987, 212; Tolstoj 2003, 168). In Takovo, Serbia, it was the souls of suicides and those who died a violent death that were thought to conduct hailstorms (Filipović 1958, 201). In the Mariovo region of Macedonia, where Ljupčo Risteski conducted fieldwork in the 1990s, the victims of drowning were thought to possess the power over hail (1999, 95).

Similar notions were also recorded by earlier ethnologists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosnian Serbs in the Visoko region 'believed' that when bad weather lasted for a longer period, there must have been a drowned person in the water. Bosniaks in the same area thought it was an illegitimate child or a victim of a murder who must have been thrown into the water, and that the bad weather would not stop until the bodies were taken out of the water. When a suicide was committed in Kakanj in 1930,

Filipović wrote, the people from the neighbouring villages immediately feared a storm and, "as luck would have it, a storm came right after that" (1949, 205).

Atmospheric water thus indicated the moment of ('bad') death, pointed to the dead buried outside of the sacred place of the cemetery or was understood as governed by the dead. Indeed, rather than the dead in general, it was particularly those who drowned, committed suicide by drowning or hanging themselves, those who were killed (see Tolstoj and Tolstaja 1981a; Tolstoj 2000, 7–8; Tolstoj 2003, 83), illegitimate, unbaptised, aborted and killed newborn children, who, generally speaking, were put in relation to rain, storms and hail, and were also thought to be responsible for droughts (see Bošković-Stulli 1953, 338; Đorđević 1958/1, 76; Schneeweiss, 2005, 152; Warner 2011). The dead that were typically related to atmospheric water were, therefore, those dead that according to Slavic vernacular notions belonged to a category of 'unclean' dead, thought to remain in between the realms of the living and the dead and to turn into a harmful force that intruded into this world and caused harm to the living (cf. Risteski 1999, 93; Vinogradova 1999, 46–49; Warner 2011, 156ff).

Many practices carried out against storms and hail, but also to produce rain during rainless periods, demonstrate that it was indeed the 'unclean' dead whom people typically thought to govern atmospheric water and whom they addressed for help. According to a report from the region between Prizren and Peć (Peja), Kosovo, at the end of the nineteenth century, when a storm was inevitable, an old woman would start waiving with a sieve in the courtyard and yelling at those who had drowned or hanged themselves to direct the clouds "where no song is sung, where no one cries, where roosters don't crow, [direct] them to the mountains where there is no one!" (Tolstoj and Tolstaja 1981a; Tolstoj 2003, 83) – a typical designation of the otherworld in Slavic incantations (see Radenković 1996, 47–79). In Takovo, Serbia, when hailstorms were approaching, peasants, trying to avert the danger, would call for help to the last suicide from their or the neighbouring village, which was supposedly present in the clouds (Filipović 1958, 201). When clouds carrying hail approached a village in Dragačevo, Serbia, people would likewise address the drowned or hanged people from the village through incantations, asking them to take their '(white) cattle,' i.e. clouds, and lead it away from the fields (Tolstoj 2003, 253–54). In the 1970s, Bulgarian ethnologists observed a so-called 'weather woman' from a village in the vicinity of Plovdiv who, aiming to drive hail-bearing clouds away from the village, lifted her skirt, uncovered her genitalia and shouted to the clouds three times: "Jorgo [the name of a drowned villager], go to the mountain where the chicken doesn't sing, go there!" (Tolstoj 2000, 7–8). In the Mariovo region of Macedonia in the 1990s, in order to prevent hail, an old person would request the drowned persons from the village to redirect the hail clouds away from the village, "to the high mountains and dense forests" (Risteski 1999, 95). In the first half of the twentieth century, similar practices were recorded among Bosnian Serbs living in the Visoko region in Central Bosnia: When a storm was approaching, old women would go in front of the house, bring out their wedding shirt and call out the names of all the drowned people from the village, asking them to drive the storm away from their fields and prevent it from falling 'on the harvest.' If hail was approaching, they would likewise

call the name of the last drowned person and ask them to drive 'their cattle,' that is the clouds carrying hail, away (Filipović 1949, 205).

Moreover, as the unclean dead were thought to be in charge of atmospheric water, they could not only prevent the storm or hail from falling, but also, for an extended period, stop the rain altogether, and thus cause *drought*. To prevent drought and other misfortunes, Russian peasants made sure that the unclean dead were kept moist and damp, and their corpses were thus often re-interred in wet places (rivers, lakes, ponds, swamps etc.) or their graves watered (Warner 2011). In the Polesye region of Belarus, if someone who hanged themselves was buried in a cemetery – which was forbidden – this was thought to cause a drought. To prevent it, people who committed suicide had to be buried either at the places where they hanged themselves or at crossroads, and their graves had to be covered with branches, which was supposed to mitigate their malevolent influence (Tolstoj and Tolstaja 1981a; Tolstoj 2003, 86). In Dragačevo in Serbia, it was 'believed' that burying an illegitimate child in the ground caused drought (Tolstoj and Tolstaja 1981b; Tolstoj 2003, 168). Similarly, in Mariovo in Macedonia, the victims of drowning were considered mediators of rain, especially during rainless periods and various practices aimed at 'manipulating' them were therefore carried out to cause rain (Risteski 1999, 96).

**The Graves Should not Be Disturbed**

In none of the above records of vernacular traditions, the idea that the dead manifest their agency through atmospheric water when their grave is disturbed is mentioned – instead, it is linked exclusively to the circumstances of their death, or burial. During my fieldwork among the Catholics (Bosnian Croats) in Herzegovina, on the other hand, narratives about atmospheric water being a consequence of people's tampering with particular grassy spots in the landscape, which turned out to be hidden graves, were abundant. Like the Icelandic narratives that Gunnell describes, these too were usually second or third-hand memorates, or simply 'statements of belief,' usually fairly short, without a well-developed and elaborated plot. However, in contrast to the Icelandic narratives, Herzegovinian narratives do not tell of people who tampered with these spots despite their being aware of the prohibition against doing so; instead, they only recognised them as places that should not be tampered with after the consequence had befallen them. As in one of the *álagablettir* presented in Gunnell's paper, in which a storm would blow away the hay if the place was harvested (2018, 28), hail, but also (heavy) rain and storms are seen as a usual consequence of disturbing such spots in Herzegovina. Typically, these stories tell of a person who, conducting an everyday activity, usually ploughing or digging the land, is suddenly affected by an unexpected hailstorm. This would immediately be understood as a consequence of their tampering with graves, and thereupon all work would immediately cease. As these spots were always unknown, ancient gravesites, invisible on the surface and not marked by a tombstone or a cross, people were unaware of the dead body buried beneath, and it was

as a rule only through the appearance of such sudden hailstorms that they recognised that it was actually a grave that they had tampered with:

> I1:[1] They say this is one hundred percent true. Now, whether it is or not… I didn't see it. There is a hamlet next to here, towards the mountain. The man started building a house there. [It was] your cousin [turning to his neighbour]. And he came across the graves. They say that hail started falling out of the blue. Hail! And there are many such stories in the village. When something went across the graves, it immediately hailed out of the blue.
> M: And what did people do then?
> I1: Nothing, they stopped, they stopped working.
> I3: Here, we don't touch …
> I1: Here … the grave is not to be touched. (146)

> That's what my mother used to say. [Our] late uncle went to plough the garden, which is behind the cemetery. And then, when he ploughed – he didn't know what it was – when he ploughed, he obviously ploughed over that grave. What was [later] discovered to be a grave. He said that it was such a storm that God forbid! Hail... out of the blue! […] And then he didn't dare [to plough there] anymore. Even now it was left aside when they turned over the soil, it was left there, and no one is allowed to walk over it… (148)

> Once, when, you know, when someone disturbed bones, there was immediately hail… They say that that's a sign you should not disturb anything. God's sign that there is no disturbing… Graves should not be touched. […] You know, like God warns you: Do not touch that! (153)

The core message that these memorates convey is unequivocally clear: graves should not be disturbed in any way. The hail thus features as a sign that one has stumbled upon a grave, but also as a warning that people should stop tampering with the spot. While the significance of such stories attached to particular grassy spots may be limited to the person or family who owned the land and had endeavoured to build a house or plough the land there, the moral that the dead should not be disturbed in their graves, which these stories mediate, has a broader relevance, my interlocutor emphasised:

> But the village is full of such stories. About graves. Probably with some aim [to convey] to us younger generations that we should not touch the graves. Probably this is also the reason. Because, how would I say, our people feared God, no matter whose grave it was – do not touch it! This is the basic rule here. (146, I1)

The prohibition to desecrate graves, also supported by law, is strictly observed not only among the Catholics in Herzegovina, but also in Bosnian regions, in particular among the Bosnian Muslims. Indeed, for the Bosniaks, the prohibition against disturbing graves is also reinforced by Islamic religious scriptures (see Sokolović 1972, 64–65). The consequences anticipated when the rules of moral behaviour towards the dead are violated, such as psychological problems, illness, traffic accidents, and even death that

[1] I in the interviews indicates an Interlocutor, and M the author. The number in the brackets after the interviews refers to the number of the interview and the interviewee in the Archive kept at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana.

befell a person who disturbed a grave by ploughing, digging it up, building anything over a grave and similar (Mencej 2024; 2025), however, are derived neither from the state's legal statutes nor official religious scriptures. Rather, they are a matter of vernacular religion.

In the region of Central Bosnia where I conducted fieldwork, nowadays mainly populated by Bosniaks, it was 'a common belief,' Filipović wrote already in the mid-twentieth century, "that there would be a storm if an old grave is dug up. When archaeologists conducted an excavation in Srh near Breza in 1913, hail struck from the clear sky, people in this village say. From that the peasants concluded that there was a grave there." (1949, 209) Yet while I too have during my fieldwork come across stories about various consequences of disturbing the graves, atmospheric water as a consequence of disturbing the graves featured rather rarely. Indeed, stories rather pointed to other sorts of misfortunes. I was told, however, that exhuming the dead from a graveyard during the construction of a highway in the 1970s indeed resulted in prolonged rain:

> I: And when that cemetery down by the station was moved and was being dug up – the entire time it was being dug up, it rained. There were floods. It didn't stop. Everything was dug out of the ground and transported, even fresh bodies, as it had to be moved away.
> M: And why did this cause the rain?
> I: [sigh] I don't know... It was raining all the time. For sixty days, it rained every day. (10)

More recently, devastating floods have been explained by my Bosniak interlocutors as the result of the digging out of the graves – although the two events, that is, the disturbance of the graves and floods, did not take place simultaneously but were only linked subsequently. When in May 2014 several Bosnian towns were struck by huge floods triggered by prolonged and heavy rains, they were retroactively related to the dead who were removed from the graveyards upon the construction of the road years earlier. In the northern Bosnian town Maglaj, for instance, which suffered horrible floods due to which 1,650 buildings were demolished and around 6,000 people were left homeless, the narratives that spread soon afterwards found this particular past violation of the moral behaviour towards the dead to be the primary cause of the tragedy:

> I1: Well, maybe you saw in Maglaj, when those houses were …?
> I2: Yes, when they collapsed. Well, when there were those huge floods. […] And now people assume that this happened because those bones had been moved. Because they were moved, someone dug them up and moved them, so that the highway could be built there. (20)

## The Dead, the Rain and the War

More usually, however, atmospheric water in contemporary narratives told by Bosnian Muslims is linked with the dead who were the victims of the war that, following the disintegration of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, took place on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992–1995. While the war has been officially

termed a 'civil war' between the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats and Bosniaks (occasionally also between Croats and Bosniaks), it began as a war for territory, serving Serbian but also Croatian expansionist appetites (Donia and Fine 2011, 17–18). Some 95,940 people were killed and more than two million became refugees or were displaced in the period from 1992 to 1995, when the war formally ended; 62,013 victims were of Bosniak ethnic affiliation (Honig and Both 1997; Tokača 2012, 13-14). During the war, rain was thus thought to be a sign of someone's death:

> This happened in Sarajevo during the war. I remember, when it rained heavily, people would say: Someone died. Someone got hurt, right? Somewhere there was some armed conflict and… (246)

Rain is also thought to accompany the exhumations of the body remains of war victims from hidden mass graves after the war. After the Bosnian Serb Army had committed mass murders of the Muslim population, they, attempting to hide their crimes, often threw the dead bodies into caverns or shallow caves dug out for this purpose. When these hidden graves were being found, and their bodies finally exhumed, rain was said to have fallen throughout the process:

> I2: And when they take those [bodies] out, when they find those mass graves, it is raining all the time when they are working. It rains for the whole month when they work there, it rains for a month. When they are taking out those bodies. It is raining all the while they are doing this.
> M: And why do you think this is?
> I2: Here they say that Allah cries over these people. (37)

Not only the moment of their death, and their exhumation, but their funeral too is often said to be accompanied by rain. People thus claimed that it always rains during the commemoration of the victims of the genocide in the Srebrenica region, which took place in July 1995 and claimed the lives of 8,372 Bosniak victims (Čekić et al. 2010), and the burial of the remains found over a year, which take place every 11 July at the Potočari cemetery. As with the excavation of the victims' bodies from the hidden graves (see inf. 37 above), the rain that allegedly always falls during their burial is also understood as Allah weeping for the dead (see also Henig 2017, 48).

**The Power of the Dead over Rain in Inter-Ethnic Relationships**

Moreover, there is a particular category of the dead who among the Muslim population in Bosnia and Herzegovina were traditionally thought to have power over atmospheric water – these were shehids (from Arabic *shahid*, a martyr fallen while fighting on 'Allah's path'). In Bosnian Muslim legends, the shehids are said to have been beheaded in a battle and to have carried their heads for a time before falling to their deaths (Softić 2005, 51–53, 170). Before the war, the cult of shehids, that is, fallen Muslim warriors from the Ottoman Empire, believed to be immediately granted access to Paradise after death

(Brown 2004, 432), was still rather significant in the Sufi-influenced region of Central Bosnia, even if it was already fading. To ensure the rain, women in the springtime engaged in outdoor prayers for rain at places near shehids' mausoleums or tombstones. At the same time, shehids were thought to protect the community from destructive storms and hail (Bringa 1995, 172–74; Henig 2017, 50). In the post-war context, their power over rain can occasionally also be used within the framework of the somewhat tense inter-ethnic relationships. In a village in Western Bosnia, I was thus told that their shehid brought rain and crops to the local Bosniak community, whereas it brought hail which destroyed the crops of the Serbs from the neighbouring village who had during the war demolished his mausoleum:

> And people sit there, we sit there, now, when the mausoleum has been repaired again. The hail hasn't yet destroyed our crops since. It destroyed it there, over the river [pointing to the Serbian village – op. M.M.], but never here! (138)

## Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to show, in a rather limited space, that the widespread traditional Slavic notions of a close connection between the dead and atmospheric water in its various forms (rain, hail, storm, but also the absence of water, in other words drought) continue to influence interpretations of contemporary events in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, in contrast to the traditional Slavic ideas about atmospheric water being associated with the 'unclean' dead, in my fieldwork data from Bosnia and Herzegovina atmospheric water is not associated with the 'unclean' dead or with the circumstances of their ('bad') death and burial. As the understanding of suicide and the policy of burial of suicides, illegitimate children and other 'unclean' dead has changed – they are no longer buried outside the cemetery and thus excluded from the society of 'ancestors,' as was the case in the not too distant past – the fear of the 'return' of the 'unclean' dead has obviously diminished in today's society, and with it their importance in folklore and vernacular practices.

In the Herzegovinian region where I did my research, inhabited exclusively by Catholic Bosnian Croats, atmospheric water appears in situations in which the norm of moral behaviour towards the dead – the prohibition against disturbing their graves – is violated, even if unintentionally. In this ethnically non-mixed area, where ethnic/religious identity is extremely important and strongly permeates daily discussions and practises, it is noteworthy that these stories emphasise the need to respect the dead – the ancestors.

As with the Catholics, the Bosnian Muslim population nowadays too does not associate atmospheric water with the 'unclean' dead. Instead, it is sometimes associated with the same violation of disturbing the graves as among the Catholics in Herzegovina – as in the case of devastating floods that have affected a larger area. Most often, however, rain as a manifestation of the dead today seems reserved for the victims of war: it indicates the moment of their death, the process of their excavation from hidden graves, and finally their proper burial. In these emotionally charged situations, rain

sometimes also takes on a religious connotation: it is understood as Allah's weeping for his people. To understand this religious interpretation, it should be noted that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, religious affiliation is crucial in defining and differentiating the ethnic identity of Bosnian Muslims from that of Catholic Bosnian Croats and Orthodox Bosnian Serbs and that since the war, Islam has become much more dominant than it used to be in socialism (cf. Bougarel 2007). Indeed, inter-ethnic/religious tensions have become yet another framework within which atmospheric water and the dead are being brought together.

What I have tried to point out in this short paper is that the traditional connection between atmospheric water and the 'unclean' dead has lost its meaning under the new circumstances in which they are no longer buried outside cemeteries and thus no longer trigger people's fears and anxieties about their afterlife. Instead, atmospheric water has, in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, become associated with the moral failings of the living towards the dead, and in particular with the greatest moral failing of them all: the killings in the recent war. Furthermore, atmospheric water governed by the sacred dead has also become an instrument of power in the tense inter-ethnic relations of the post-war period. Ultimately, therefore, traditional notions about the connection between the atmospheric water and the dead demonstrate a remarkable ability to adapt to ever-changing geographical, social, cultural and political realities to address people's greatest fears, concerns, and anxieties – be they about the afterlife, loss, morality, natural disasters, or ethnic and religious identity.

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# *PATHY*: THE MAGICALITY OF RITUAL SPACE

Anoop Vellani*

"Oh God! Please come.
Please come here.
Flows out,
Like flooded water.
They fly,
Like fish in the sea."

This *thullal* song,[1] is sung by the Pulayas of central Kerala (a prominent 'Scheduled Caste' in Kerala State in the southern part of India) to invoke their ancestors. This song is usually performed as a part of the ritual called *thullal,* a peculiar type of dance by oracles. The song narrates the return of the spirits of the Pulayas' ancestors and deities to their world, a ritualistic invitation for the spirits to enter the material realm of everyday life. This practice is still performed at the *pathys* of central Kerala after the harvest during the month of *Kumbha* (March in the Gregorian calendar).[2] The magical space created through this ritual and its verses is not merely a recollection of an ancient practice. Rather, it is a dialogical site for contemporary discourses. The transformation of their usual space, in which they are living, into a magical space, is an active process reflecting the socio-political dynamics of Pulaya daily life. This paper aims to explore how these ritualistic practices define and redefine space, examining the relationship between real and magical spaces and their significance in the cultural context of the Pulaya caste.

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[1] *Thullal* songs invite the ancestors to the performance space as a part of the rituals in the pathy. It has a formal structure and lines are formulated according to the peculiarities of each *pathy*.

[2] Despite the social changes which have occurred in contemporary society, the belief systems are still in practice.

## Rituals in the *pathy*: The Pulayas of Central Kerala and Their Belief Systems

In exploring the belief systems and ritual practices of the Pulaya caste, it is crucial to first provide an overview of this community. Predominantly located in the southern Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, among others, the Pulayas are also known by various other names, such as Cherumar and Holier, all belonging to the same caste.[3] The Pulaya caste is one of the major castes (in number) in the South Indian region. The Indian Constitution affords certain protections and benefits to economically disadvantaged communities by designating them as 'Scheduled Castes.'[4] Article 366(24) of the Indian Constitution defines Scheduled Castes as follows: "Such castes, races, or tribes, or parts of or groups within such castes, races, or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 to be Scheduled Castes for the purposes of this Constitution."

Within Kerala, the Pulaya caste is further divided into several subgroups, such as the Malayapulaya (Pulayas from the mountains) and Thandapulaya. Historically, this caste enjoyed a significant social standing. There are references to kings and many people even owned land in the community according to old literature and myths. Gradually, they, however, lost their glory and became a labour community, primarily working as paddy field labourers for landlords. As a result of the Renaissance and access to education, the social status of the people improved, bringing about changes in their cultural landscape and beliefs. Yet, even today, during gatherings in the sacred space of *pathy*, they connect with their ancestors and deities, where they are transformed into the Pulaya soul, a transformation process which has its distinct cultural connotation.

Due to the wide distribution of the Pulaya population spread across the state, there is considerable variation in their culture and beliefs. Therefore, when examining this community's cultural and belief systems, it is essential to focus on a specific geographical location. While similar beliefs with slight regional variations can be observed in other areas, the data presented here have been collected primarily from the Thrissur district, specifically regarding the practices and rituals specific to the two Panchayats (local governing bodies) named Kadukutty and Annamanada, both located in the central region of Kerala, commonly referred to as central Kerala.

## Deities Worshipped in the *pathy* and Their Nature

*Pathys*, being commonly situated near paddy fields, are intrinsically linked to fertility practices and the daily lives of the labouring Pulaya community. Historically marginalised within the rigid caste system, the Pulayas were often barred from participating in mainstream Hindu worship practices. Even as late as the early twentieth century, Pulayas in Kerala were denied entry into Hindu temples, the primary centres of

[3] According to the caste system in South India, the characteristics of Pulaya communities are different in each state. Edgar Thurston states in his book *Caste and Tribes of South India* (1909) that there are different categories in the Pulaya community in Kerala.

[4] The term 'Scheduled Caste' was coined by the Simon Commission in 1928. It was used to discuss the untouchable communities.

worship. Consequently, the Pulayas developed their own deities and myths, deeply intertwined with their everyday lives, whom they worship in the sacred space of the *pathy*.

The power structure within the *pathy* is primarily determined by the hierarchy of the deities worshipped in this sacred space. Unlike pan-Indian mythological concepts and religious beliefs, which are absent in these rituals, the deities of the Pulayas reflect their lived experiences and ancestral lineage. The principal deity in the *pathy* is the Madapathy, representing their ancestors. The primary Madapathy is often regarded as the first or oldest ancestor, a figure believed to possess knowledge of witchcraft and who serves as the protector of the entire community. Each *pathy* has its own Madapathy, representing the specific ancestor worshipped in that space. All other deities enter the *pathy* under Madapathy's leadership, establishing his prominence and hierarchical superiority in this sacred space.

Another significant deity in the *pathy* is Bagavathy, a concept also prevalent in broader Hindu beliefs but interpreted differently within the Pulaya community. In the *pathy*, Bagavathy is worshipped in two forms: Thekkan Chowa and Vadakkan Chowa. In addition to these deities, the *pathy* is home to various other entities of a more malevolent nature, such as Arukola and Thendan, who are considered to be vampires and spirits. These deities are closely connected to the external social life and experiences of the Pulaya community.

**Rituals in the *pathy***

The rituals associated with *pathy* exhibit subtle regional variations, yet they follow a consistent structure. Central to these practices are fertility rituals, typically conducted during the Malayalam month of *Kumbha*, which coincides with the end of the paddy cultivation season. During this time, the community gathers at the *pathy* to perform rituals and seek blessings from their ancestors and deities.

Figure 1. Rituals in the *pathy.*

Figure 2. *Mudiyattom* in the *pathy.*

These rituals begin in the evening and conclude in the early hours of the following morning. The first ritual involves drawing intricate designs known as *kalams*, which symbolise various deities and ancestral figures. Each *pathy* features different types of *kalams*, with specific numerical patterns, such as the twelve squares in the *kalam* for Madapathy. Once the *kalams* are drawn, offerings, which may include blood or liquor, are made. Hymns are then sung in honour of each deity, and people may also invoke their ancestors by name. This is followed by a unique ritual known as *thullal pattu* or *thudippattu*.

The *thullal pattu* is a crucial element in this sacred setting, as it transforms the physical space of the *pathy* into a magical one. This ritual involves a dance form that invokes the ancestors through the chanting of family names. As the song progresses, some participants may enter a trance-like state, embodying their forefathers and performing a dance known as *thullal* in the ritual space. Although the dance is not mandatory, the rhythmic accompaniment of the *thudy* (a special percussion instrument) is essential. Through this process, the *pathy* is imbued with the presence of the ancestors, creating a magical atmosphere.

In this transformed space, various dances such as *Mudiyattom* (a dance involving the swinging of hair, see Fig. 2) and *Kolkkali* (a dance with sticks) are performed to please the ancestors and deities. These rituals continue until midnight, after which specific offerings are made at each *kalam*. The *kalams* are then ceremonially erased by the priest, signifying the return of the *pathy* to its ordinary state. By around 3 AM, the rituals come to an end. While there may be slight regional differences, this structure represents the common pattern of rituals observed in the *pathy*.

**Primary Data and Background of the Study**

The primary data of this paper is taken from interviews that I conducted during my research on witchcraft practices among the Pulaya caste.[5] Over the course of more than five years, I conducted over a hundred interviews and actively participated in Pulaya festivals and rituals held at the *pathy*s. For this paper, I have selected a few key conversations from the years 2014–2015 as models to support my arguments. All interviews discussed here took place in natural settings.

The data for this study have been collected from members of the Pulaya caste in the Valoor, Kathikudam, and Kakkad regions of the Annamanada and Kadukutty Panchayats, which constitute the social and material space of this research. As evident in the maps, the geographical area of data collection is situated on both sides of the Chalakudy River, the fifth-largest river in Kerala. The land along the riverbanks is highly fertile, making paddy cultivation a common practice.

[5] Vellani 2019. All interviews referenced were conducted during my research period. While the interviews are unpublished, they have been uploaded to the research portal. Link: http://hdl.handle.net/10603/358438.

Figure 3. Location of Kerala state

**The Interviews and Experience**

All notions illustrated here are drawn from my own experiences. During my fieldwork, an elderly woman named Ayya explained the concept of *pathy* to me. She was the daughter of Madapathy, the leader of the *pathy*, and she performed magical rituals to cure or heal small ailments. She narrated:

> There was a time when we were barred from entering temples. We worked in the fields and never saw a god. So, we consider our forefathers as gods. If we keep a stone and consider it as uncle, it is him; and if we consider it as our father, it is him. They are all our gods. They are at our back and call. The *pathy* is the shrine where Chowa, Bhagavathy, and Yakshi all gather.[6] (Ayya, 2014)

From this narrative, we can understand that the basic concept of the *pathy* is deeply tied to regional worship practices at performative places with a close relation to nature. Their worship stones are seen as their forefathers; still, this performative space is maintained in their contemporary ritual space. Although the idols' form and the shrine's material structure may have changed, the core beliefs and rituals remain intact.

Subran, a folk artist who performs art forms (particularly the dance form called *Kalakali*) in the *pathy*, offers another perspective:

> Usually, *pathys* are situated near the paddy fields. Here, Mambra Kalikkal *pathy* is situated at the end of Mambrapadam.[7] We have Pelicherrymuthy's *pathy* near Kootalapadam and

[6] Chowa is a female deity, considered a variant of Kali, a prominent goddess in Hinduism. Yakshi, a concept similar to a vampire, is also worshipped within the *pathy*.

[7] *Padam* is the Malayam term of 'paddy field'.

> Ariyampurampathi near Padinjarepadam. Festivals in *pathys* occur during the time of cultivation. The main priest of this shrine is called Madapathy, the leader of our local Pulaya caste. The deceased Madapathys and our local deities are worshipped here. We believe that all the deities are brought to the *pathys* by the Athimadapathy from the mountains.
> (Subran, 2014)

This account is more specific, emphasising the material aspects of the pathy over the beliefs associated with it. The witchcraft practitioner and priest named Appuchettan adds:

> Malampathy is said to be the *pathy* of those Moorthis whom our ancestors brought with reverence from the mountains. The *pathy* near our house was once a Malampathy. Nowadays, no offerings are made in this *pathy*. It is said that there was a *pokkuvaravu*[8] from our *pathy* to the *pathy* behind Surendran's house.
> (Appuchettan, 2015)

A farmer named Chandran adds more about the concept of the *Athimadapathy* who is the first ancestor leader of their community.

> Among the deities, Athimadapathy is given the most importance, followed by the ancestors. Not all ancestors are worshipped; only those who practised witchcraft and possessed magical powers are worshipped in the *pathys*. Along with them, local deities like Thekkanchowa and Vadakanchowa are also worshipped. Rituals such as invoking ancestors are performed there by singing *thullal* songs. Besides these vampires, vampires from other castes (or outside of their own cultural boundary) also visit the *pathys*, but they are treated outside the *pathys.*
> (Chandran, 2014)

It is interesting to note that these vampires are often associated with the upper caste while, in the recreated magical space, their hierarchical position is reversed. In the imaginary nexus of these people, this reversal of social order is a form of resistance against the traditional hierarchy, a theme evident in many magical performances of the Pulaya caste.

A notable aspect is how these people conceptualise and change the hierarchical positions of their material world in this magical space. A person called Radhakrishnan from Annamanada Panchayath explains these concepts in another way:

> There are vampires from other castes too, like Thendan and Arukola, who are not included in this *pathy*. They are found near rivers and canals. Their journey is described as *pokkuvaravu*, following specific routes, such as the path from the pond at the end of Karikkapadam, crossing Eyyathumkadavu to Annamanada. The spirits of those who died untimely deaths are prohibited in these *pathys*. These spirits, along with the demons of Lord Shiva, pass through

[8] *Pokkuvaravu* refers to the journey of goddesses and ancestors associated with a particular *pathy*, as they travel from the *pathy* to a nearby temple and return along the same route. *Pokkuvaravu* is considered a more benign journey than *Therkkettu*, the nocturnal travels of malevolent vampires, characterised by loud laughter and dancing. If encountered by common people, they are believed to attack.

> this route with lighted lamps and laughter. The usual time for these journeys is between 2:30 AM and 3:30 AM. Anyone trespassing during these hours will be attacked by the spirits. With the advent of electricity, things might have changed.
> (Radhakrishnan, 2014)

The timeframes and routes of these wandering vampires are clearly described in this narration. When we look into the contemporary context, the roads and the physical conditions of the lands in these descriptions may have changed but their culturally constructed maps persist in a collective superstructure, serving as an ideological or imaginary landscape.

Sudheesh, a man who performs these rituals, describes these vampires in more detail:

> Those who died untimely deaths reside near rivers and are called Neetubhootham, Neetarukola, and so on. Their *pokkuvaravu* are called *therkkettu*. If anyone trespasses their area, whether it is a canal or a field, they will be attacked. I had an experience myself. Now, electric lights have interrupted the *therkkettu*.
> (Sudheesh, 2015)

> All these concepts originated in the early stages of their history when there were no electric lights and in the beautiful atmosphere of darkness, they created the imaginary other world of vampires. But in the contemporary situation, we can't see the vampires in the light!
> (Arun Ezhuthachan, 2008)

As a part of this study, we examined two versions of the *thullal* song, performed in the *pathy* by Rajan and Vellayudhan, the practitioners of this ritual. Since they belong to different *pathys*, their songs vary accordingly as follows:

**Version 1**
*Punjaparambil Vellonmuthan should clearly glow,*
*Kutyvengan Muthan should clearly glow,*
*Anamanada Thevaru should clearly glow,*
*Malarkandan Muthan should clearly glow,*
*Chembankarichila Muthappan should clearly glow,*
*Our beloved Madapathy should clearly glow,*
*Vallamchacky Muthy and Chowa should clearly glow,*
*Kuttykatty Kuladaivam should clearly glow.*[9]
(Rajan 2015)

**Version 2**
*Come, come, please come, please come here, god.*
*Ye god shines.*
*Oh Ma… the one who dwells at Kodungalloor,*
*Oh Ma… do not block our chariot.*
*We light the holy lamp*

[9] All the names mentioned in this song represent the forefathers of those gathered at the specific *pathy*.

*To mark our kalam.*
*Children of generations invite me to the abode.*
*They call me by my names—the name given by the father*
*and the name called by the mother.*
*[Mentions of the names of the ancestors of the* pathy*]*
*Runs out, runs out like flooded water.*
*Blows like dried leaves in the wind.*
*They fly like fish in the sea.*
*Dance, dance, and dance,*
*And come to this world.*
(Velayudhan 2015)

These two *thullal* songs are structured like a chain, with each group contributing verses that honour their own ancestors and the deities they worship. This is the basic form of the song. In the first version of the song, all the names are of their ancestors and the second version of the song highlights the names and the routes they take from the otherworld. The second *thullal* song illustrates their journey and entry into the magical space of the *pathy* in a dramatic way.

**Mapping Ideological/Cultural Space**

The material space is transformative, and when mapping it, time becomes a crucial factor: As material and architectural spaces change over time, a chronological approach is required to trace these changes. In the magical sphere, the fluidity of time allows for the coexistence of historical and contemporary figures in the popular imagination. The history of the material locale is intertwined with the history of the magical space, both mediated by cultural space. By analysing the data presented, we can identify two distinct types of 'space.' The first is the material space, the physical location where rituals occur and where people gather. The first three interviews mentioned above highlight this material space of the *pathy*, referring to its geographical and tangible characteristics.

However, this material space undergoes a transformation into a supernatural or magical space during the rituals. This transformation is not spontaneous; it is deeply rooted in numerous myths and beliefs, as described in the interviews. As individuals enter or participate in this material space with these beliefs, they, too, transform, adopting a different identity as the space itself becomes magical. Once the rituals conclude, the space reverts to its original state as a normal, material space.

The magical space within contemporary geographical features must be traced to map the cultural space represented in the narrations. While the geographical space in reality and the narrations overlap, the inhabitants, travel paths, and power structures differ. Thus, mapping the cultural/ideological locale involves defining the imaginary locale constructed by people within the real social/material locale. Topographical and geographical features mentioned in the narrations remain the same in both spatial concepts.

The Chalakudy River and its banks serve as the setting for these ritual spaces. All the paddy fields and roads mentioned in these conversations are situated on the riverbanks of Chalakudy. The area from Thaikoottam to Annamanada (the travel routes of wandering vampires in the narrations), once full of plantations and paddy fields, has been largely replaced with settlements. The physical nature of the *pathy* is described in the first narration has also changed. However, the identity of the people, their beliefs, the nature of ancestral worship and its imprints in their culture remain the same. The people who have participated in the ritual are transformed into another identity, and with this newly constructed identity, they are recognised in the imaginary space.

**Magical Space as a Transformative Space**

As used in this paper, magical space refers to the discursive site comprising both the performative space (where rituals are performed) and the cultural space (where myths and related beliefs are formed) within the *pathy*. The discourses associated with this magical space, including rituals, knowledge and literary forms, initiate varied dialogues within it, creating a rich and dynamic environment. Hence, the magical space is not created in the *pathy* itself but it is an assemblage of the many beliefs associated with the concept of death and life after death in Pulaya society.

Performative Space ⇒ Cultural Space
⇓
Magical Space

In this study, death is used as a metaphor to conceptualise magical space within the *pathy*. While death is normative and considered a natural phenomenon in every society; untimely or accidental deaths transform the concept of death into a magical topography. In the material context of such deaths, the deceased are often denied ceremonial rituals. This detaches them from the imaginary nexus of social or material life, creating a world of expelled spirits, an 'other world' that violates social processes. The fear of this neglected 'other world' forms the foundation for the constitution of a magical world, which is central to the supernatural beliefs of the Pulaya caste. The *thullal* song and related rituals performed in this magical space are considered key features of these beliefs. The transformation of the *pathy* only occurs in the material space, but the presence of the supernatural world with the forefathers and their connection to the material space is what creates a magical space.

To effectively identify this space, we can employ various techniques, such as locating geographical features like rivers, fields and ritual spaces mentioned in the Pulaya narrations, or identifying specific places of worship. This study mainly focuses on narrations associated with pathways, places of worship, paddy fields and especially the final gathering in the *pathy*'s magical space of the *pathy*, from Kadukutty Panchayat to Valoor in Annamanada Panchayat. Understanding the concept of the 'other world' as manifested in the narrations is crucial for mapping the magical space.

As we have seen, the *pathy*, situated near the paddy fields, serves not only as a religious site but also as a vibrant gathering place where the Pulayas proclaim their liberty during festival seasons like *Pathamudayam*[10] and harvest days. It is thus conceived as a geographical space where the spirits of ancestors from different periods gather, making it significant in mapping the magical terrain of the locality.

The formation of modern Kerala society has dismantled erstwhile variegated concepts of spirits, leading to a unified understanding of the *pretham* (the spirits of unnatural and accidental deaths). Beyond analysing the occult genres on the basis of a changing social order, society is reflected in these patterns, thereby constructing a social history. For that purpose, I propose that death is to be understood as a magical metaphor here.

Traditionally, death marks the completion of actions in life and is perhaps the culmination of social participation in life. In pre-religious Kerala society, death was however not seen as the end of social performance; rather, it introduced a pause. Death ceremonies initiated the soul into ongoing social processes. In other words, the soul becomes a part of the discourses of everyday life. This can be illustrated as follows:

Social life – Death – Death rites – Life after death – Social life

A study of magical rituals, beliefs and knowledge derived from spirit worship can shed light on the implications of this evolution. The magicians, chieftains, and warriors, figures revered in pre-religious spirit worship, are believed to have played a significant role in shaping the social structure. They were seen as deeply intertwined with daily life, allowing the community to interact with them more intimately than with the gods. This suggests that life after death coexisted with material life, a notion supported by cave carvings and megalithic monuments. In other words, life after death co-exists with material life, as indicated by the ancient cave carvings and megalithic monuments (cf. Thapar 2003, 147).

The binary distinction between social life and the life of the deceased is dismantled through death ceremonies. These rituals allow the deceased to transcend death and re-enter social life. However, when such rites are prohibited, particularly in cases of untimely or accidental death, their absence creates new meanings. Denial of ceremonial rituals to those who die under such circumstances detaches them from the imaginary nexus of social life, forming an 'other world' of isolated spirits:

Social life – Accidental or untimely death – Denied burial – Other world

This neglected 'other world' of banished spirits disrupts social processes and generates fear which forms the bedrock for the creation of a magical world. This fear-driven response can be considered the first step toward the evolution of a branch of magic with customary magical rituals as a part of ancestral worship in Kerala. These contrasting

[10] This day, which mostly falls on the 10th of April, has been regarded as the best time for the beginning of cultivation based on the position of the sun.

worlds have been interpreted differently in different contexts by various historians. Romila Thapar, for instance, identifies two modes of ancestral worship:

> The early text on domestic rituals mentions two categories of the rituals for the dead. The lesser category releases to the prethas, those recently dead whose spirit may still be hovering among the living and have to be appeared and set to rest by a series of ceremonies. (Thapar 2003, 687)

Thapar (2003, 687) also notes that the worship of spirits and devils is rooted in this horror and the attempt to regulate it, ensuring a peaceful ancestry and preserving the memories of the past.

When discussing the savagery period, Frazer (1916) noted that people during this era were slaves of their past and their ancestral spirits. This is manifested in each and every ritual from birth to death, reflecting an ideological connection between the physical world and the 'other world.' It can be argued that the materialistic society itself determines the discourses within this other world. In other words, signs of the social order are demarcated by the magical spaces associated with death in the 'other world.'

**Power Structure: Cultural Space and Discourse**

The exploration of this material space described in the narrations is essential for analysing the supernatural space. Considering this supposition in terms of spatial metaphor, the social/material space forms the base structure, while the ideological/magical space forms the superstructure. The beliefs related to death in Kerala society, from prehistoric times to the present, have been shaped and conditioned by social changes.

The cultural space where these two categories intersect and engage in discourse reflects the geographical terrain's multidimensional links. These relationships are influenced by the positions held by the inhabitants within the material power structure of their society. The Pulayas in particular have strategically interpreted the magical space to challenge the existing social order, asserting their positions through this discursive space. The transformation from real to magical space constitutes a significant discourse in their social life and historical narrative.

The politics of defining magical spaces highlights the importance of exploring new dimensions within the study of magic. The magical space, evolving from the existing social and political context, varies across places and times, impacting both social and magical spaces. The Pulayas' use of this magical space to challenge prevailing hierarchies exemplifies their strategic political engagement, thereby underscoring the significance of examining the mapping and transformation of this space as a critical area of study.

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# GLÆPUR OG REFSING Í SÖGUM UM ÁLAGABLETTI

Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir,[*] Jón Jónsson[**]

Íslensk þjóðtrú er síbreytilegur og spennandi efniviður sem gaman er að glíma við. Þjóðtrú er meðal annars miðlað í gegnum fjölbreyttar þjóðsögur og sagnir, bæði af yfirnáttúrulegum verum og vættum, svo sem draugum, tröllum og álfum, eða frásagnir úr daglega lífinu, sem stundum er ætlað að útskýra eitthvað í umhverfinu eða annað sem fyrir ber. Þjóðtrú, sögur og sagnir, miðla gjarnan hugmyndum um hvernig fólk á að haga sér, hvað er æskileg hegðun og hvað ekki. Þegar fólk gerir vel í þjóðsögum er það verðlaunað, en þegar það brýtur gegn ríkjandi hugmyndum um æskilega hegðun er því refsað og oft grimmilega (Mullen 1971, 408–11; Gunnell 2008, 15). Dæmi um slíkar sögur eru frásagnir um álagabletti, en slíka staði kannast flestir við.

„Ég trúi ekki beint á þetta, en ég myndi samt ekki taka neina áhættu," er algengt svar þegar Íslendingar eru spurðir um trú sína á yfirnáttúruleg fyrirbæri (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Sigurlaug Dagsdóttir 2024). Þetta kom m.a. fram í spjalli í nýlegum hlaðvarpsþætti þar sem tekið var viðtal við Terry Gunnell sem hefur skoðað álagabletti út frá ýmsum sjónarhornum, meðal annars hugmyndum um trú og einnig gert samanburð við trúarhugmyndir í þjóðsagnaefni í nágrannalöndunum (sjá t.d. Gunnell 2007; 2008; 2012; 2018). Í þessari grein langar okkur hins vegar að beina sjónum að hugmyndum fólks um áhættuna og þá refsingu sem vofir yfir ef brotið er gegn bannhelginni og hvaða máli trúarhugmyndir skipta í því samhengi. Hvaða reglur er fólk að brjóta þegar það slær, spillir eða eyðileggur álagablett og hverjar eru afleiðingarnar? Og hvað geta þessar sagnir sagt okkur um samfélag fólksins sem sagði þessar sögur, ótta þess og drauma?

## Álagablettir á Ströndum

Við höfum skoðað sögur og sagnir um álagabletti og álagastaði á Ströndum frá árinu 2013. Það sumar settum við upp tímabundna sögusýningu um álagabletti á listasviðinu

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á safninu Sauðfjársetri á Ströndum. Í framhaldinu unnum við svo áfram með efnið og gáfum út bók árið 2021, þegar sýningin var tekin niður (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2021).

Álagablettir eru staðir í náttúrunni sem bannhelgi og álög af einhverju tagi er tengd við. Á Íslandi eru sögur af álagablettum oft tengdar huldufólki, afmarkaðir grasblettir þar sem slægjurnar tilheyra vættunum og bannað er að slá eða rista torf. Oft eru þessir blettir í grennd við kletta sem huldufólkið býr í. Það er þó alls ekki alltaf rauninni að álagablettir tengist eða séu í eigu huldufólks. Einnig er nokkuð um að álög hvíli á fornmannahaugum og rústum eða tengist erfiðum gönguleiðum og hættulegum giljum, ám og vötnum. Eins þekkist að tröll komi við sögu og á nokkrum jörðum eru búsetuálög sem kveða á um hámarkstíma sem þar má búa (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2021, 23–31).[1] Þjóðtrúin um álagabletti er alls ekki sérislensk. Svipaðar sögur af álagablettum eru sagðar á Írlandi, Skotlandi, í Hjaltlandseyjum og Færeyjum, en einnig á hinum Norðurlöndunum (Gunnell 2012, 4–7).

Ef fólk brýtur gegn bannhelgi sem hvílir á álagablettum, þeim fyrirmælum sem munnmælin miðla, hefnist viðkomandi fyrir. Algengasta refsingin í sögunum á Ströndum er að besta húsdýrið á bænum drepst, besti reiðhesturinn eða fallegasta mjólkurkýrin. Aðrar refsingar eru t.d. að heyið fjúki eða brenni og jafnvel veikindi eða dauðsfall (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2021, 23). Á síðari áratugum þegar sögur um samskipti vegagerðarmanna og framkvæmdaaðila við huldar vættir verða ráðandi, koma svo óútskýrðar bilanir á vinnuvélum og tækjum nokkuð við sögu, en þar er frekar um að ræða aðvörun frá yfirnáttúrunni (Valdimar Hafstein 1998b, 328–33). Refsingin fyrir að eyðileggja álagabletti er þannig ólík eftir stað og stund, en þegar sagnirnar sjálfar eru skoðaðar betur má sjá á þeim hvað það var sem skipti fólkið máli og hvað það óttaðist helst. Framfærsla fólksins var í húfi og jafnvel stundum lífið sjálft.

Til grundvallar rannsókn okkar lágu sögur um álagabletti á Ströndum sem finnast í útgefnum þjóðsagnasöfnum sem aðgengileg eru í sagnagrunninum og viðtölum í Segulbandasafni Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar sem eru aðgengileg á vefnum ismus.is. Eins er heilmikið þjóðtrúarefni að finna í örnefnaskrám jarða sem einnig eru varðveittar á Árnastofnun, í handritum og í svörum við spurningaskrám Þjóðháttasafns Þjóðminjasafns Íslands.[2] Sumarið 2013 kortlögðum við slíka staði sem finnast í þessum heimildum og gagnasöfnum og gengum að álagastöðum um alla Strandasýslu, könnuðum aðstæður, ræddum við staðkunnuga og tókum ljósmyndir.[3]

Verkefnið var fljótt að vinda upp á sig og álagablettunum fjölgaði verulega eftir því sem leið á sumarið, umfram það sem við höfðum búist við, enda var unnið jafnhliða að

[1] Talsvert hefur verið skrifað um álagabletti, sjá t.d. Árni Óla 1968; Helgi Hallgrímsson 1988; Valdimar Tr. Hafstein 1998a, 1998b og 2000; Bjarni Harðarson 2001; Rakel Valgeirsdóttir 2007; Terry Gunnell 2008, 2012 og 2018; Inga K. D. Magnúsdóttir 2016; Bryndís Björgvinsdóttir 2016 og 2018 ásamt Svölu Ragnarsdóttur; Símon Jón Jóhannsson 2020; og Egeler 2024.

[2] Sjá rafræna gagnagrunna: Sagnagrunnur, rafrænn gagnagrunnur fyrir útgefnar þjóðsögur á https://sagnagrunnur.com; ÍSMÚS, rafrænn gagnagrunnur Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar á https://ismus.is; Örnefnaskrár, rafrænn gagnagrunnur fyrir örnefnaskrár á https://nafnid.is; Þjóðháttasafn Þjóðminjasafns Íslands, rafrænn gagnagrunnur https://sarpur.is undir *þjóðhættir - svör*.

[3] Fyrir nánari útlistun á aðferðafræði rannsóknarinnar sjá Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2024.

heimildarannsókninni og vettvangsathugunum. Þegar við heimsóttum fólkið á bæjunum þar sem við vissum um álagabletti, var okkur oft bent á fleiri slíka staði. Um suma þeirra hafa engar sagnir verið skráðar og engin sérstök saga fylgdi staðnum. Bara upplýsingar um álögin og að þau hefðu aldrei verið rofin svo vitað væri. Þetta er í takt við það sem Carl Wilhelm Sydow kallaði „dites" eða trúarstaðhæfingar og Terry Gunnell „potential legends", þar sem eingöngu kemur fram viðvörun um að ekki skuli spilla tilteknum stað, því það muni hafa afdrifaríkar afleiðingar (Gunnell 2012, 2).

Það kom í ljós í rannsókn okkar að fleiri álagablettir eru þekktir eftir því sem norðar dregur í Strandasýslu, sem er ekki augljóst að útskýra. Mögulega er þetta afleiðing af því að sömu ættirnar hafi lengi búið á jörðunum eða á sama svæði og upplýsingum hafi því verið betur miðlað kynslóða á milli og frá manni til manns. Stundum hafa álagablettir líklega ekki þótt skipta máli nema bara fyrir þá sem bjuggu á bæjunum, sérstaklega ef engin krassandi saga sem á heima í þjóðsagnasafni fylgdi þeim (Gunnell 2012, 1). Það kom líka í ljós að nákvæm staðsetning nokkurra álagabletta virðist endanlega glötuð, þótt sögur um slíka staði séu varðveittar. Þeir eru yfirleitt á jörðum sem farnar eru í eyði.

Allt þetta sýnir glöggt að enn er til margvíslegt óskráð sagnaefni um samskipti fólks og hulinna vætta í sveitum landsins. Eins og Terry hefur sjálfur talað fyrir, er enn mikil þörf á að safna slíkum sögum og fróðleik með sérstöku átaki á landsvísu; þjóðtrúarefni, sögum og reynslu úr samtímanum.

## Glæpur og refsing

Það er einkenni á sögnum um álagabletti að um þá gilda reglur sem ekki má brjóta gegn. Þessar reglur þekkir eldri kynslóðin og hefur í heiðri og þeim er miðlað frá manni til manns, frá kynslóð til kynslóðar. Þegar nýr bóndi tekur við jörð, hafa þessar reglur sennilega verið hluti af þeim leiðbeiningum sem fylgdu frá fyrri ábúendum, ábendingar um varúð við nýtingu jarðarinnar. Sögurnar verða svo til þegar brotið er gegn þessum reglum og refsing fylgir í kjölfarið.

Fyrirmælin sem fylgja álagablettum og þær samskiptareglur sem á að virða geta verið mjög nákvæmar. Um álagablettinn Bolla sem er uppi í hlíðinni framan við gilið og bæinn Brunngil í Bitrufirði segir Guðný Gísladóttir til dæmis í viðtali sem Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson starfsmaður Árnastofnunar tók við hana árið 1978:

> Það mátti ekki slá þar, ekki rista torf, en það mátti beita kúnum þar alltaf á sunnudögum og það var alltaf gert þegar ég var krakki. Og við máttum ekki hafa neina háreysti þarna og helst ekki tína ber, en það var þó ekki neitt sagt við því að við tíndum upp í okkur (SÁM 92/3009 EF).

Föðurafi Guðnýjar hafði sagt þá sögu að hann hefði einu sinni farið óvart of nálægt blettinum þegar hann risti torf og fékk ærin Grána heldur betur að kenna á því vegna þess.

Álagablettir sem tengjast huldufólki eru oft í grennd við híbýli þessara vætta og tengjast búskapnum. Margar sögur á Ströndum eru frá fyrri hluta 20. aldar. Ein slík er

til dæmis um Kastalann, litla grösuga klettaborg við bæinn Hlíð í Kollafirði. Í Kastalanum býr huldufólk og munnmælin sögðu að hann væri magnaður álagablettur sem ekki mætti slá, huldufólkið ætti grasið á honum og nýtti fyrir sinn bústofn. Börnin á bænum máttu þó leika sér á og við klettinn án þess að verða meint af, þótt háreysti og grjótkast hafi líklega verið illa séð þar eins og við aðrar álfabyggðir.[4] Ungur bóndi, Oddur Lýðsson, sló Kastalann fyrst eftir að hann flutti að Hlíð árið 1914. Þá var hjá honum kona sem varaði hann við því að slá blettinn og sagði frá álögunum, en hann tók lítið mark á slíkri hjátrú. Þetta búskaparár varð hann fyrir miklu óláni með skepnur og var það tengt álagablettinum (Bragi Jónsson 1971, 113; DOJ/JJ 2013-2).

Síðar á lífsleiðinni, sló Oddur Kastalann aftur og varð einnig þá fyrir óláni. Hann hafði selt kvígu til bónda í grenndinni, fengið borgað fyrirfram og þegar ráðstafað peningunum. Þegar hann fór svo til að afhenda kúna nýjum eiganda, stoppaði hann á næsta bæ í kaffi hjá frændum sínum og batt kúna við staur á meðan. Þegar hann kom út hafði kúnni tekist að hengja sig í bandinu og sat hann uppi með tjónið. Almannarómur var að þetta óhapp stafaði af því að hann hefði aftur slegið álagablettinn, að óþörfu (DOJ/JJ 2013-2; DOJ/JJ 2013-4; DOJ/JJ 2013-11). Áhugavert er að bóndinn hafi látið reyna á þetta aftur, en líklega var sú skoðun talsvert útbreidd á fyrri hluta 20. aldar að ekki ætti að gefa neitt fyrir sögur um yfirnáttúrulega vætti og verur, þær væru aðeins hjátrú og kerlingabækur. Jafnvel svo að fólki hafi fundist mikilvægt að sýna fram á í verki að ekki væri mark á slíku takandi.

Aðvaranir eru algengt minni í álagablettasögum. Ungur og framtakssamur bóndi sem ætlar að ráðast í framkvæmdir og gera hlutina öðruvísi en þeir hafa áður verið gerðir, er vissulega varaður við, oft af eldra fólki á bænum. Bóndinn lætur þessar viðvaranir sem vind um eyru þjóta og heldur áfram, slær álagablettinn eða spillir honum á annan hátt. Fyrir þetta er vitaskuld refsað. Óhætt er að segja að í mörgum tilfellum sé glæpurinn í sögunum ekki aðeins spjöllin á álagablettinum, heldur einnig að hlusta ekki á og hunsa ráðleggingar þeirra sem eldri eru og vitrari. Þannig endurspegla álagablettasögur einnig oft átök milli kynslóða.

Í viðtölunum sem við tókum árið 2013 í tengslum við uppsetningu sýningarinnar, sagðist einn viðmælandi okkar sjálfur hafa eyðilagt álagablett þegar hann var ungur. Ýta hefði þá verið komin í sveitina, á vegum búnaðarfélagsins, og bændurnir fengu hana til afnota hver á eftir öðrum. Þegar ýtan kom á þeirra bæ, gerðist hann ýtustjóri og sléttaði túnið af mikilli ákefð næstu daga, lagaði til í kringum bæinn og mótaði landslagið. Vann hann þá oft fram á nótt. Einn daginn þegar hann fór á fætur voru móðir hans og amma heldur en ekki ergilegar og skömmuðu hann duglega fyrir að hafa kvöldið áður eyðilagt blett neðst á túninu sem ekki hefði mátt raska. Hafði hann þar ýtt upp efni í veg eða afleggjara frá aðalveginum og heim að bænum, svo hægt væri að aka heim á hlað. Viðmælandinn sagðist reyndar ekki hafa gert þetta viljandi, hann hefði ekkert munað eftir þessari sögu meðan á verkinu stóð. Hann sagði okkur síðan, dálítið glottuleitur, að honum og þessu atviki hefði verið kennt um allt sem aflaga hefði farið í búskapnum veturinn á eftir og jafnvel næstu árin. Reyndar hefði fallegasta mjólkurkýrin á bænum

[4] Það er algengt minni í sögum af huldufólki að börn megi ekki kasta grjóti, eða vera með hávaða og læti við bústaði þess.

einmitt fengið doða um veturinn, sem konurnar hefðu talið beina afleiðingu af þessari vegagerð. Það má því líta svo á að í þessu tilfelli hafi refsingin verið í höndum kvennanna á bænum. Hann sagðist að minnsta kosti ekki eyðileggja álagablett aftur, þótt hann tryði ekkert endilega á þá, en gæti þó heldur ekki þvertekið fyrir að fleira væri til í veröldinni en það sem blasir við fólki. Hann hefði almennt séð verið lánsamur í lífinu og fannst alls ekki að sérstakt ólán hefði elt sig, eins og stundum væri sagt um þá sem brytu gegn bannhelgi (DOJ/JJ 2013-27).

Slík dæmi sýna trúarhugmyndir, þó að stundum sé auðveldara að greina raunverulega þjóðtrú út frá því sem fólk gerir, en því sem það segir. Í miklum klettahöfða við Brúará í Kaldrananeshreppi er sagt að sé álfabústaður. Fyrir neðan klettana er brekka sem bannað er að slá og rista torf í. Sagt er að hestar á Brúará hafi jafnan haldið sig frá brekkunni og ekki viljað bíta grasið sem þar óx. Nálægt miðri 20. öld var nýr ábúandi að reisa fjárhús rétt neðan við álfabyggðina og risti hann torf úr blettinum ásamt því að taka steina úr klettaveggnum. Nóttina eftir varð fólkið á bænum vart við hávaða og þegar út var komið morguninn eftir var það sem búið var að hlaða af fjárhúsunum hrunið. Trúin á álagablettinn reyndist þá svo sterk að torfinu og grjótinu var skilað í brekkuna og klettana, eins og mögulegt var, áður en tekið var aftur til við framkvæmdir við fjárhúsin og efnið þá sótt annað (Þorsteinn Matthíasson 1967, 11; SÁM 90/2295 EF; DOJ/JJ 2013-12; DOJ/JJ 2013-13).

Það mætti velta því upp hvort að í sögunni um Brúará felist einnig viðvörun gegn því að stytta sér leið, það er auðveldast að sækja efniviðinn í höfðann, en fólki hefnist fyrir og þarf þá að bæta fyrir brotið og byrja upp á nýtt. Því hefur einnig verið velt upp hvort að stóri glæpurinn í álagablettasögum sé græðgi, en það er algengt minni í íslenskum þjóðsögum að fólki hefnist fyrir slíkt.[5] Sagnirnar beri þá með sér skilaboð um að ekki eigi að taka meira en það þarf eða ganga á landið meira en nauðsyn krefur. Sýna þurfi umhverfinu og náttúrunni tilhlýðilega virðingu, rétt eins og þeim ósýnilegu vættum sem byggja landið og eigum annarra.

Í dag tengjast þær sögur sem oftast heyrast um árekstra mannfólks og huldra vætta vegagerð og umhverfisvernd. Sögur endurspegla hugmyndaheim hvers tíma og það er alveg ljóst að umhverfismálin eru stór hluti af umræðu dagsins í dag. Þessi togstreita á milli þess að vilja vernda náttúruna og nýta hana er þó ekki ný á Íslandi og rómantískar hugmyndir um óspillta náttúru eru ekki nýjar af nálinni (Valdimar Hafstein 1998b, 334–35).

Þekkt dæmi eru um að sjáendur, prestar eða miðlar hafi verið kallaðir til og þeim verið falið það verkefni að semja við álfa og huldufólk þegar upp koma hugmyndir um bannhelgi við framkvæmdir. Þessar samningaviðræður við huldufólkið snúast oftast um að biðja það að flytja búferlum. Gripið er til þessa ráðs til að gera framkvæmdir mögulegar, að hægt sé að halda áfram við fyrirhugað verkefni (Valdimar Hafstein 1998a, 379–91).

[5] Sjá til dæmis sagnir af fépúkum í þjóðsagnasafni Jóns Árnasonar og einnig er talsverður kafli í flokknum kímnisögum í safni hans um nápínuskap og nirfilshátt, sjá Jón Árnason 1954–1961 I, 254–65; II, 510–17; III, 337–49; V, 415–24.

Ekki er mikið til af sögum um árekstra við huldufólk við vegagerð á Ströndum, en þó einhverjar. Við vegagerð í Smáhamrahálsi við Steingrímsfjörð og þar í nágrenninu á síðustu öld var til dæmis kallað á prest til að blessa svæðið, eftir að umtalsverðar og óskiljanlegar bilanir höfðu orðið á vélum (DOJ/JJ 2013-2; DOJ/JJ 2013-4). Eins má nefna að við Seljá milli Byrgisvíkur og Veiðileysu stendur stakur steinn, rétt við veginn. Þegar vegur var lagður í Árneshrepp á sjöunda áratug 20. aldar vildu heimamenn ekki að hróflað yrði við honum, þar væri huldufólksbyggð og steininum mætti ekki raska. Orðið var við þessu og honum hlíft, bæði þá og áratugum síðar, þegar veginum var breytt (Rakel Valgeirsdóttir 2007, 20; SÁM 2362 EF). Sömuleiðis er sagt að staðið hafi til að sprengja burt Skyrkollustein í Trékyllisvík við vegagerð þar, en fallið frá því vegna andstöðu heimamanna (Rakel Valgeirsdóttir 2007, 19–20; SÁM 85/589 EF; DOJ/JJ 2013-26).

Býsna sérstök saga er sögð af Stúlkuhól í Þiðriksvalladal við Steingrímsfjörð, stórum klettahól framan við Þiðriksvallavatn í grennd við Hólmavík. Hefur fólk löngum trúað að í hólnum búi huldukona (Örn.skr. Þiðriksvellir 1953, 4–5; Örn.skr. Þiðriksvellir 1934). Um miðja 20. öldina hófust framkvæmdir við að reisa stíflu við vatnið vegna Þverárvirkjunar. Þá komst sú saga í hámæli að konu á Hólmavík hefði dreymt að það myndi boða illt ef vatnið myndi ná fram fyrir Stúlkuhólinn. Var töluvert um þetta rætt, enda fylgdi spádómur um að ef hóllinn yrði umflotinn, þá myndi Hólmavík brenna eða samfélagið sundrast (SÁM 85/596 EF; DOJ/JJ 2013-19; DOJ/JJ 2013-30). Stíflan hefur verið stækkuð tvisvar sinnum síðan þá og yfirborð Þiðriksvallavatns hækkað í bæði skiptin. Vatnið nær nú að Stúlkuhól, en yfirborðið mætti hækka talsvert enn, áður en flyti í kringum hólinn.

Skilaboð um að láta ekki ágirnd og græðgi hlaupa með sig í gönur, er þó enn frekar áberandi í sögum af álögum á fornmannahaugum og þar sem gull á að vera grafið í jörðu. Oft fylgja þá ströng fyrirmæli um að ekki megi reyna að grafa það upp eða sett fram skilyrði sem ómögulegt er að uppfylla. Dysin hans Brodda á nesinu milli Kollafjarðar og Bitru er dæmi um slíkt, þar má enginn reyna að ná í fjársjóðinn nema óspjölluð ungmær sem situr á dysinni með óskírt ungabarn hjá sér yfir nótt. Munnmælin segja að flakkari sem reyndi að grafa í dysina á síðari hluta 19. aldar hafi hvoru tveggja misst vitið og orðið ógæfumaður (DOJ/JJ 2013-1; DOJ/JJ 2013-14). Annað dæmi um afleiðingar þess að brjóta gegn slíkum fyrirmælum má sjá í sögunni af Gullhól, sem stendur í túninu í Tröllatungu í Tungusveit. Sú trú að þar hafi verið falið gull og gersemar er forn og hefur verið býsna sterk. Á Gullhól eru álög og bannað að hrófla við honum. Ef grafið er í hólinn sýnist mönnum að kirkjan eða bærinn í Tröllatungu standi í ljósum logum (Þorsteinn Erlingsson 1954, 346–48; DOJ/JJ 2013-9).

Vitað er um tvær tilraunir til að grafa í hólinn. Á upplýsingaröld fengu danskir stúdentar leyfi frá Danakonungi til að leita þar að gulli. Sagt er að þeir hafi grafið í dágóðan tíma, enda er töluverð laut í hólinn sem snýr heim að bænum. Uppskeran varð hins vegar engin, enda er hóllinn stór og hurfu þeir frá verkinu án þess að fá laun erfiðisins (Gísli Jónatansson 1990, 74; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2021, 74). Gísli Jónatansson, kenndur við Naustavík, og annar ungur drengur grófu líka dálítið í hólinn snemma á 20. öld. Segir Gísli sjálfur í frásögn í Strandapóstinum að hann sé

handviss um að sjaldan hafi gullgrafarar verið hræddari við iðju sína en einmitt þá (Gísli Jónatansson 1990, 75).

Það er áhugavert að það virðist ekki jafn mikill glæpur að reyna að grafa upp gull og að spilla fyrir huldufólki. Kirkjan eða bærinn sem sýnist standa í ljósum logum, brennur ekki í raun og veru, heldur virðist einungis standa í björtu báli. Þarna er um einhverskonar sjónhverfingar að ræða. Það að fylgja ekki fyrirmælum munnmælanna er samt ekki eini glæpurinn þegar grafið er í hauga, heldur er einnig glæpur að raska ró hinna látnu. En hver er þá refsingin í raun og veru? Hér skiptir máli að í sögum af leit að gulli og gersemum í jörðu tekst raunar aldrei að ljúka glæpnum, sjónhverfingarnar eru aðvörun og framtakið er stoppað af áður en gullið finnst. Vinnan er öll til einskis.

Stundum eru afleiðingarnar af því að hrófla við álagabletti hins vegar alveg hræðilegar í sögunum. Fólk hefur þannig oft tengt saman slysfarir og dauðsföll og það að brotið hafi verið gegn bannhelgi. Nokkur dæmi eru um sögur á Ströndum, þar sem dauði fólks er tengdur við slíkt. Í Ósá í Steingrímsfirði er hylur í ánni sem heitir Svartafljót. Þau álög fylgja honum að þar má ekki veiða silung og viðurlögin eru að sá bóndi sem brýtur gegn bannhelginni mun missa mann í ána. Sagt er að bóndinn á Ósi hafi látið veiða í hylnum sumarið 1887 og um haustið hafi 17 ára smalapiltur á bænum drukknað í ánni og reimleikar fylgt í kjölfarið (Örn.skr. Ós 1929, 4; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir og Jón Jónsson 2021, 85). Önnur saga frá öðrum bæ á Ströndum er talsvert yngri, frá árinu 1953, og fjallar um hól sem tilheyrir huldufólki og átti að auki að geyma könnu fulla af gulli. Þrátt fyrir þau munnmæli var hóllinn sléttaður út með jarðýtu. Ungur maður á bænum hrapaði í klettum og lét lífið veturinn eftir og voru þessi atvik tengd saman (Árni Óla 1968, 127; DOJ/JJ 2013-20). Þriðja sagan frá Ströndum þar sem dauðsfall er tengt við álagablett gerist í Bitrufirði. Magnús Kristinsson á Þambárvöllum segir svo frá í svari frá 1997 við spurningaskrá Þjóðháttasafns Þjóðminjasafns um náttúruhamfarir:

> Á bænum Snartartungu hér í sveit er graslaut sem heitir Rauf með fallegum blómum að sumrinu. Þetta er álagablettur sem ekki má slá. Ef það er gert kemur eitthvað fyrir á heimilinu. Ég veit ekki hvort þetta var álitin huldufólks byggð eða eitthvað annað.
>
> Ég hefi heyrt minnsta kosti 2 gömul dæmi þess að lautin var slegin. Annað dæmið frá fyrri öld. Í bæði skiptin drápust uppáhalds gripir, kýr eða hestur veturinn eftir. Svo sumarið 1925 var lautin slegin. Þá um veturinn þann 14. des. varð piltur frá Snartartungu úti í stórhríð (ÞÞ: 12503/1996-1).

Í þessum sögum er eftirtektarvert að refsingin bitnar ekki beint á þeim sem gerist sekur um að brjóta gegn bannhelginni, heldur á einhverjum af yngri kynslóðinni sem lætur lífið vegna þess. Engu líkara er en að refsingin fyrir þann brotlega sé að lifa áfram, með skoðun samfélagsins á þessu öllu saman á bakinu og ef til vill að þurfa að auki að burðast með sjálfsásakanir og sektarkennd.

**Snjóflóðið í Goðdal**

Vettvangur hrikalegustu sögunnar þar sem rask á álagabletti er tengt við slysfarir er Goðdalur í Bjarnarfirði. Þar var búið þangað til snjóflóð féll á bæinn og lagði hann í rúst, sunnudaginn 12. desember 1948. Snjó hafði kyngt niður á Ströndum og mynduðust hengjur í fjallshlíðum. Margar minni snjóskriður féllu og veðrið var slæmt, svo símalínur rofnuðu og sambandslaust varð á milli bæja, sem ekki var óalgengt á þessum tíma. Í Goðdalsbænum voru sjö manns þegar flóðið féll, Jóhann bóndi Kristmundsson og kona hans Svanborg Ingimundardóttir og dætur þeirra Svanhildur átta ára og Ásdís tveggja ára. Einnig Jónína Jóhannsdóttir sem var rúmliggjandi í herbergi sínu, fullorðin föðursystir Jóhanns bónda, Guðrún Jóhannsdóttir dóttir Jónínu og Jónas Sæmundsson sonur Guðrúnar. Þrjú börn Jóhanns og Svanborgar voru ekki heima (NN 1948, 1).

Bærinn stóð inni í dalnum, langt frá öðrum bæjum og það var ekki fyrr en fjórum dögum síðar sem farið var fram að Goðdal. Fyrr vissi enginn hvað gerst hafði. Á fimmtudeginum fór unglingur á nágrannabæ með póst fram í dalinn og kom að rústunum um hádegisbilið. Þegar hann sá ummerkin, hljóp hann eins og fætur toguðu að bænum Skarði að sækja hjálp, en þangað er um eins og hálfs tíma gangur. Þar voru staddir fjórir karlmenn sem hröðuðu sér að Goðdal og fóru tafarlaust að grafa í rústunum. Þegar fréttirnar bárust kom fólk frá fleiri bæjum að hjálpa til og einnig hópur manna frá Hólmavík (NN 1948, 1; Jóhann Kristmundsson 1983, 108–16).

Fólkið í Goðdal lá því í rústunum frá sunnudegi fram á fimmtudag áður en hjálpin barst. Aðeins Jóhann bóndi lifði af. Lífsmark var einnig með Svanhildi, 8 ára dóttur hans, og Jónasi, 19 ára vinnumanni, þegar þau voru grafin úr flóðinu, en Jónas lést í höndum björgunarmanna og Svanhildur litla dó úr hjartabilun þremur klukkutímum eftir að henni var bjargað (NN 1948, 1; Jóhann Kristmundsson 1983, 108–16).

Það er alveg ljóst að fjölmargir Strandamenn trúðu því að snjóflóðið tengdist því að íbúðarhúsið hefði verið byggt á bletti sem bannhelgi hvíldi á. Það kemur meðal annars glöggt fram í viðtölum varðveittum í segulbandasafni Árnastofnunar. Á árunum kringum 1970 fór Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson þjóðháttafræðingur um landið og tók viðtöl og spurði Strandamenn þá meðal annars út í snjóflóðið í Goðdal. Meðal annars segir einn að þetta hafi allt verið með ólíkindum: „Það var svo einkennilegt að snjóflóðið það varð að taka krók á sig til að geta tekið bæinn“ (SÁM 90/2295 EF). Viðmælendurnir virðast trúa því einlæglega að snjóflóðið hafi orðið, beinlínis vegna þess að hróflað var við álagablettinum.

Jóhann hafði reist húsið á Bólbalanum árið 1938 og brotið land til ræktunar upp af húsunum. Við framkvæmdir í nágrenni við húsið var meðal annars komið ofan á hleðslu sem talin var undirstaða af hofi, en því hafði lengi verið trúað að þarna væri álagablettur, sem ekki mætti raska. Húsið hafði vissulega staðið áfallalaust í áratug eftir að það var byggt, en heimildarmenn höfðu líka skýringar á því. Vísað var til þess að Kristmundur faðir Jóhanns hefði verið andvígur því að hróflað yrði við Bólbalanum og byggt þar, eins og kona ein lýsir í viðtali sem tekið var af Hallfreði 1972:

> Kristmundur í Goðdal hann vissi vel um þennan álagablett og hann lét aldrei nokkurn tímann hrófla við honum á meðan að hann lifði. Nú dettur syni hans í hug að byggja einmitt þarna

> framfrá, honum Jóhanni heitnum, en Kristmundur biður hann í öllum lifanda bænum að gera þetta ekki. Eigi síður vill hinn ekki trúa á neina fordóma og byggir þarna og ég veit nú ekki sönnunar á því en ég hef heyrt það sagt að hann hafi sagt gamli maðurinn við hann: Ég veit það verður ekkert að á meðan að ég lifi en lengur tek ég nú ekki ábyrgð á því, Jóhann minn. Ég heyri að þessi orð eru höfð eftir honum (SÁM 91/2452 EF).

Hér má þannig einnig sjá minnið um viðvaranir þeirra sem eldri eru og reyndari (sjá einnig SÁM 92/2597 EF; SÁM 93/3500 EF). Kristmundur lést svo sumarið 1948, sama ár og snjóflóðið féll.

Það er þó ekkert skrítið að heimildarfólk Hallfreðar hafi tengt álagablettinn og snjóflóðið svona sterkt saman, því blaðaumfjöllunin strax eftir flóðið var í þessum anda. Því var fljótlega slegið upp í fjölmiðlum að því væri um að kenna að byggt hefði verið á álagabletti. Þann 11. janúar 1949 birtist í Vísi viðtal sem var tekið við Jóhann, meðan hann lá ennþá á sjúkrahúsi. Það er í nokkrum æsifréttastíl eins og fyrirsögnin sýnir: *Harmleikur í Goðdal: Gekk í berhögg við álögin – og nú er bærinn í rúst* (NN 1949a, 5–7).

Blaðamaður Vísis spyr hvort það sé satt að íbúðarhúsið í Goðdal hafi verið byggt á álagabletti sem ekki mátti raska. Jóhann svarar eftir bestu getu og virðist átta sig vel á að fólk hafi áhuga á þessari tengingu. Hann segir að í Goðdal séu fleiri en einn álagablettur, t.d. í mýri innantúns sem ekki megi slá. Ef hann væri sleginn áttu kýr að deyja af heyinu og hestar að detta niður dauðir. Bólbalinn hafi svo verið annar slíkur álagablettur, en hann hefði gengið í berhögg við þessa arfsögn og byggt þar húsið sem nú væri rústir einar (NN 1949a, 5–7).

Það vekur athygli í þessu dæmi frá Goðdal að alveg eins og í öðrum tilvikum sem við röktum fyrr í greininni þar sem dauðsfall er tengt við að hróflað sé við álagablett, að þau sem láta lífið eru samkvæmt almannarómi sjálf saklaus af því að hafa brotið gegn bannhelginni. Sá sem brýtur gegn fyrirmælunum um álagablettinn lifir eftir, en fjölskyldumeðlimir láta lífið. Jóhann náði sér aldrei fullkomlega, lá mánuðum saman á sjúkrahúsi og missti fótinn (NN 1949b, 4). Búskap á jörðinni lauk við þessar hörmungar, en sumarbústaðir standa enn í Goðdal.

**Niðurstöður**

Þó að bæði glæpurinn og refsingin virðist í fljótu bragði frekar augljós og blasa við þegar álagablettasögur eru skoðaðar, er ljóst að hvort tveggja er í raun margslungnara. Það er ekki eingöngu brotið gegn huldufólkinu eða öðrum ósýnilegum vættum þegar álagabletti er spillt, heldur líka þeim reglum sem gilda, óskráðum boðum og bönnum. Með sama hætti er leiðbeiningum eldri kynslóðarinnar ekki fylgt og sögnum ekki sýnd tilhlýðileg virðing.

Fólki sem við ræddum við í tengslum við rannsóknina okkar varð einmitt tíðrætt um virðingu þegar það talaði um viðhorf sín til álagabletta. Þá kom vel í ljós hversu marglaga og flókin þessi hugmynd er og einnig hversu mikið lykilhugtak er hér á

ferðinni.[6] Fólk passaði oft vel upp á og var stolt af álagastaðnum í sinni landareign og miðlaði fúslega fróðleik og sögum. Þetta var ekki alltaf vegna þess að það tryði sjálft sögunum eða væri yfirleitt trúað á tilvist hulinna vætta. Stundum snéri virðingin almennt að sögustöðum í náttúrunni eða tengdist náttúruvernd, umhverfi og landslagi, stundum var líka talað um virðingu fyrir gömlum sögnum og þjóðsögum. Eins nefndi fólk að það væri sjálfsagt að sýna hugmyndum annarra sem tryðu á tilvist huldufólksins og segðust sjá slíkar verur virðingu.

Refsingarnar eru líka fjölbreyttar, en þær snúa þó jafnan að því sem var fólki hugleikið í lífinu, því sem fólk óttaðist. Þær höfðu neikvæð áhrif á búskapinn og þar með afkomu bæjarins og framfærslu fjölskyldunnar. Það að tapa besta reiðhestinum eða mjólkurkúnni var án efa mikið högg hér áður fyrr og ekki einungis fyrir þann sem braut af sér, heldur alla sem á bænum bjuggu. Þjóðtrúin gegnir hér líka því hlutverki að reyna að skýra það óskiljanlega, eins og sviplegan dauða eða óvænt slys, bæði á dýrum og fólki. Áföll, hörmungar og hrakfarir, hafa augljóslega alltaf virkað eins og segull á allskonar þjóðsagnaminni.

Sagan um snjóflóðið ægilega í Goðdal árið 1948 er hrikalegasta álagablettasagan á Ströndum. Atburðurinn er nálægt okkur í tíma og varð landsþekktur og umræddur í fjölmiðlum. Við teljum óhætt að fullyrða að þessi umfjöllun hafi á sínum tíma beinlínis orðið til þess að viðhalda, styrkja og staðfesta trú fólks á álagabletti, bæði á Ströndum og um land allt. Þessar hörmungar hafi orðið að einskonar táknmynd um hversu ógnvænlegar afleiðingar það gæti haft að raska álagablettum. Frásögnin hafi bæði staðfest þá í trúnni sem héldu að sögur um álagabletti gætu vel verið sannar og líka vakið upp efasemdir hjá þeim sem sögðust engan trúnað leggja á slíka hjátrú.

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# (SUPER)NATURAL AND (NON)HUMAN ENTANGLEMENTS ON ICELAND'S SHORES

Alice Bower,[*] Kristinn Schram[**]

The Icelandic shore as a chaotic liminal zone, is explored in Terry Gunnell's excellent analysis of the legend of the "Hairy man of Skarð" (Icel. *Loðni maðurinn á Skarði*) (Gunnell 2017). There, on the shore, the wild and the civilised, the human and the non-human animal, come into intimate contact and are melded together, with the uncanniest of results. Many narratives of human and non-human entanglements in the North Atlantic indeed present us with the dynamics of mobilities and morphing environments. Ranging from Old Norse poetry and prose to contemporary legends, narratives express both worldviews and local knowledge of land and seascapes as crucial to transnational networks, human and non-human. They also may entail a sense of the out-of-place not least in times of flux and climate emergency when they take place at the ever-changing interface of the shore. Whether it be driftwood, polar bears, whales, walruses, warships, or people, whatever appears 'out of the blue' or 'washed ashore' has particular local significance and, ultimately, global implications in the representation of the north and their people. They shape various imaginaries of northern regions, position them within apparently disastrous binaries of nature/ culture but also may question established boundaries and ontological assumptions. This article explores these dynamics on Iceland's coasts and engages with how flora, fauna, landscape and the human experiences within them are narrated, experienced and apprehended. In particular, it questions how the supernatural relates to notions of entanglement, the more-than-human and landscapes of fear.

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## The More-Than-Human, in Theory

In recent years, folklorists have taken inspiration from approaches associated with posthumanism and the 'animal turn.' This has for example resulted in greater attention to the role of animals in folklore, not only as subject matter, but also as participants (Mechling 1989; Thompson 2010; 2019; Magliocco 2018). This is in line with how posthumanist theories are increasingly applied in the social sciences and humanities. Posthumanism problematises the category of *human* and documents how it has been used to separate man from nature, often creating the binary of the European male on the one side and nature, women, or non-Europeans on the other (Plumwood 1993). *Man* is associated with reason and culture but the contrasting "category of nature is a field of multiple exclusion and control, not only of non-humans, but of various groups of humans and aspects of human life which are cast as nature" (Plumwood 1993, 4). A post-human or more-than-human perspective offers a study of these constructions and, often, endeavours to reveal a more complex and inclusive world. These approaches, including new Materialism, nonrepresentational theory, multispecies ethnography as well as other more-than-human perspectives, offer an exploration of the epistemological, ontological, and methodological possibilities of studying life forms and materials as in a tangle of relationships, or as *naturecultures* rather than the binary nature and culture.[1]

From this standpoint, rather than existing apart from nature, humans live in relation to all other life and matter in a multispecies world, where various relationships bind them together.[2] Some of these relationships are kinship relations (Haraway 2008) while others are relationships of dependence (Yong 2016). Furthermore, there are relationships of struggle and challenging power dynamics where humans do not easily survive – or not at all (Standley and Bogich 2013; Lorimer 2016). In these frameworks, more-than-humans have agency and influence. Yet, in line with Bruno Latour's Actor Network Theory, and what Jane Bennet (2007, 33) calls an agentic assemblage, they act in relation to a bundle of other actants. Edwin Sayes goes even further in stating that "non-humans do not have agency by themselves, if only because they are never by themselves" (2014, 44). The natureculture entanglements of the North Atlantic coasts, in their entirety, will not be dealt with in this short article. For its purpose, we will suffice by discussing what non-human actants are already present in specific myths, legends and personal experience narratives that may throw light on human worldviews and belief systems.

## The Transarctic Flora of Iceland's Shores

Gleaning into the narratives of the shore, and discerning what actants, within agentic assemblage are to be recognised there, is a particularly mercurial endeavour. The central features of the shore lie not least in the fluid state of what is brought and taken away by

[1] See, for example, Latour 1993; Ingold 2000; Barad 2002; Deleuze and Guattari 2004; Haraway 2008; and Braidotti 2017.

[2] See for example studies on microbes (Heldke 2018) and mushrooms (Tsing 2012), dogs (Haraway 2008), bees (Moore and Kosut 2004), and foodstuffs (Elton 2019).

the sea. Through this natural phenomenon Iceland's shores, like many in the Arctic, contain a trans-arctic flora that is somewhat lacking in Iceland's interior: trees. The oldest written source of Iceland's settlement *Landnámabók* [The Book of Settlement], describes woodlands ranging from mountain to coast some three to four centuries prior (Jakob Benediktsson 1933). But whatever woodlands may have met the settlers they are likely to have declined quickly through slash-and-burn agriculture and animal husbandry in a cooling climate. Fuel and building materials from indigenous wood were therefore scarce after the sun set on the Viking Age and Iceland became an increasingly isolated and marginalised island in the North Atlantic. Yet, Iceland already had a transarctic source of wood originating in natural erosions and lost lumber from the northern rivers of Russia and Siberia. Crucially, driftwood is dependent on ice to carry it past the transpolar drift and to destinations on Svalbard, Iceland, Greenland and even Baffin Bay.[3]

In Iceland, so-called 'driftfarms' (Icel. *rekajarðir*) are farmlands rich in this much sought-after resource and are a defining feature in some areas, such as Strandir in North West Iceland. To this day, local communities in these areas retain relationships of dependence on driftwood (Yong 2016). Driftwood was, through the centuries, a valuable resource for humans not least as housing material and for utensils and boats. Driftwood beaches were subject to a complicated form of ownership and harsh judgements were passed over theft, determining if driftwood had been shaped by human hands, making them, at one point in history, the property of the king of Denmark, Iceland and Greenland. Driftfarmers could also mark driftwood and thus collect it later if it drifts off again (Lúðvík Kristjánsson 1980–1982, I:291–92, 299, 304–5; II:113). Driftwood was also carried throughout the land, as lumber to areas far from the currents' reach or as crafted objects. Household items carved from driftwood by the craftsmen of Strandir were, according to twelfth- and thirteenth-century sources such as *Sturlunga saga* well-known throughout the land (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, II:244). The 'Strandamenn,' who were frequently associated with magic, were known to have sold their products in Alþingi, as late as the eighteenth century (Guðmundur Finnbogason 1943, 365–66, 368).

Going well beyond practical use it is safe to assume that driftwood has been part of Iceland's cultural history, imagination and folklore since its settlement.[4] Eddic poetry, with its roots in oral tradition, attests to driftwood playing a significant role in the Old Norse worldview, even before Iceland's settlement. Both the mythological Eddic poem *Vǫluspá* and Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* tell us how the first male and female humans, Askr and Embla, were created from two driftwood logs found on the beach. Óðinn and his brothers stumble upon them and bring them to life. Similarities can of course be

[3] According to latest research, most of the Icelandic driftwood originates from the Yenisei catchment in central Siberia and is anything but stable. An abrupt decline in the amount of Icelandic driftwood supply occurred in the 1980s and it supply will cease under predicted sea-ice loss by 2060 CE, see Kolář et al. 2022.

[4] Driftwood's legal significance is witnessed in the oldest Icelandic legal works, such as *Grágás*, *Járnsíða* and *Jónsbók*, which include codices remaining largely valid into early modernity (on the archaeological, and other, evidence for the significance of arctic driftwood in the medieval period and beyond see Lísabet Guðmundsdóttir 2024; Mooney et. al. 2023; and Egeler 2024)

drawn from features of creation myths in the Abrahamic faiths: Adam and Eve breathed into life from the earthly character of clay, as compared to driftwood; the significance of the biblical Tree of Life and the World Tree of *Vǫluspá*, Yggdrasill. The latter, is, in *Vǫluspá*, described immediately following the creation of Askr and Embla, standing evergreen upon the water of destiny at its roots (*Eddukvæði* 2014, 6–7). It is not unlikely that Christian influence is at play here, although more visibly in Snorri's work, where a pre-Christian worldview is put down in written form, at least two centuries after it was dominant. But, as Gísli Sigurðsson (2013, 100) has pointed out, when taking oral tradition into account, *Vǫluspá* can be considered the culmination of a continuous literary tradition from long before the Christianisation of Scandinavia.

Interestingly, *Vǫluspá* iterates a distinct lack of agency in the driftwood trees that are to become the first humans. They are found by the Æsir in a state without destiny (OIcel. *ǫrlǫglausa*) or as Ursula Dronke states: "Their inert state of impotence, like that of the empty primordial world is itemized in negatives. All the elements of life that Askr and Embla do not possess the Æsir punctiliously supply" (Dronke 1997, 39). The idea of fate and fortune drifting ashore through godly intervention can be found throughout the sagas. *Landnámabók*, as well as many Icelandic sagas, presents us with narratives of settlers guided by the gods to the most preferable farmlands by the drifting of ships and various objects thrown overboard, such as *high seat pillars*. In one case a settler worships the god Þórr, as is common in the Sagas, asking for his own high-seat pillars. Þórr rewards the settler with a great driftwood boulder which washes upon his shore providing the material for pillars for many households in the vicinity (Jakob Benediktsson 1933, 164).[5] The currents can in these examples be seen as a way for the gods to speak through a divine language of sorts. They may also provide other boons such as beached whales, walrusses or seals, crucial to human survival in periods of hardship. But as mythological poems, local narratives and legends attest to it is not only the gifts of the gods that wash ashore. The image of the *nástrǫnd* or 'corpse shore' is, for example, also conjured up in *Vǫluspá*, where the seeress shows us a glimpse of apocalyptic hell:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 37. | Sal sá hún standa | A hall she saw standing |
| | sólu fjarri | remote from the sun |
| | Náströndu á, | on Dead Body Shore. |
| | norður horfa dyr. | Its door looks north. |
| | Féllu eiturdropar | There fell drops of venom |
| | inn um ljóra, | in through the roof vent. |
| | sá er undinn salur | That hall is woven |
| | orma hryggjum | Of serpents' spines. |
| 38. | Sá hún þar vaða | She saw there wading |
| | þunga strauma | onerous streams |
| | menn meinsvara | men perjured |

[5] The tree is also mentioned in the longer version of *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson 1943) as well as in *Gull-Þóris saga* (Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | og morðvarga | and wolfish murderers |
| | og þann er annars glepur | and the one who seduces |
| | eyrarúnu, | another's close-trusted wife. |
| | þar saug Níðhöggur | There Malice Striker sucked |
| | nái framgengna, | corpses of the dead, |
| | sleit vargur vera. | the wolf tore men. |
| | Vituð ér enn, eða hvað? | Do you still seek to know? And what? |
| | | |
| | Austur sat in aldna | In the east she sat, the old one, |
| | í Járnviði | in Iron Wood, |
| 39. | og fæddi þar | and bred there |
| | Fenris kindir | the broods of Fenrir. |
| | Verður af þeim öllum | There will come from them all |
| | einna nokkur | One of that number |
| | tungls tjúgari | To be a moon-snatcher |
| | í trölls hami | In troll's skin |
| | | |
| | (*Eddukvæði* 2014, 11–12) | (Dronke 1997, II:17) |

These stanzas curiously depict the same kind of landscape presented as the birthplace of humanity, as a beach of death, where a great dragon sucks and tears apart the corpses of the dead in the North of *hel.* It is perhaps significant that the next stanza moves from beach to woodland, or the Ironwood. This mirrors a similar juxtaposition where the previous stanza, describing the origin of Askr and Embla, is followed by a description of the great tree Yggdrasill: positive and negative reflections of birth on the one hand and destruction on the other. This movement has also taken us from the north to the east of *hel* where we are introduced to the wolfish kin of Fenrir, one of which will eventually rip apart the moon. That he is in the troll's skin or guise (OIcel. *hamr*), as the 39th stanza concludes, perhaps adds a sense of horror or uncanniness to the apocalyptic vision.

This amalgam, and in some cases merging, of supernatural creatures and animals, is not an uncommon feature of later Icelandic legends. As will be discussed in greater detail, the beach is also the backdrop of legends of supernatural beings, sea monsters and odd creatures such as the *fjörulalli*, the 'shore laddie' or 'beach creep' (who often might try to mate with the sheep feasting on the seaweed and perhaps offering an explanation of deformed lambs). Narratives of mermen, mermaids and selkies reflect an integrated oral tradition in the North Atlantic, connecting Iceland, the Faroes, Ireland and Scotland. Another group of legends, those of washed-up bodies, have the true-to-life qualities of experience narratives and memorates. As the Finnish folklorist Lauri Honko (1989, 23–39) pointed out, memorates often reflect the moral and religious life of communities. Often legends seem to have the purpose of mapping the world with its place names. Legends of washed-up corpses are an interesting case in point. A search through over ten thousand legends on *Sagnagrunnur*, the geographically mapped database of the main published collections of Icelandic folk legends, shows close to fifty

local legends of bodies washed up on beaches across Iceland's coastline.[6] The database can also help us to see the relation of this group of narratives with other aspects of folk narratives (such as ghosts, apparitions, sorcerers, dreams, burial, weather, seafaring and travel but also surprising keywords like humour, love, the devil and births).

Variations of these legends recount how the drowned appear to their loved ones through dreams directing them to their remains for burial within the bosom of their community. They express the sorrow of those who are left behind and the burning uncertainty of losing someone at sea. Another focuses on the moral and costly obligation of burying the deceased. Terry Gunnell has pointed out that they exemplify how moral mapping may run into murky waters expressing ambiguities through a remarkably effective experience. He writes that legends "provide a kind of map of how one should behave in this landscape: what is right, what is wrong, when are they right or wrong, and how punishment is likely to descend on you if you transgress the largely unwritten moral rules imposed by society" (Gunnell 2018, 27). Gunnell also points out the different dynamics expressed when the deceased is of foreign origin. The otherness of the foreigner is well demonstrated in the case of the legend known as the "Hairy man of Skarð:"

> It happened a long time ago that on one of the Meðalland beaches, the body of a man was found washed up on shore, a man of very strange appearance. He was wearing no clothes, but was covered with hair, and had claws on his fingers and toes. Some people say that two such men were washed up, both exactly the same. Even though everyone was a little frightened of these bodies, they were moved to a farm, and coffins made for them, as usually happens when such an event takes place […]. [One account says that:] The body was moved to Skarð for burial. However, when the funeral was about to take place, and people were about to sing the funeral hymns, they found themselves in difficulties, because every letter in their hymnals had turned back to front, and twisted into forms of blasphemy and curses. People thought this very strange, as might be expected, and they were lost about what to do. Little singing was done. Things went no better when the priest tried to say some words over the body. Even the blessing turned into curses as it left his lips, so he had to stop. Nonetheless, in spite of these wonders, the body still came to lie in consecrated soil, and had earth thrown on it by the priest as was planned.
>
> Many guesses were made about who this washed-up man might have been: that he might have been one of the Hound-Turks, an evil spirit incarnate, or an ape. Whatever it was, it was not long after this funeral that people started noting ghostly activities taking place in the vicinity of the Skarð church. These got so bad that it was considered impossible to travel around there after dark. People saw the "hairy man" – as the recently buried body was called – pounding the church with planks from his coffin. Various other strange things also happened there […]. Since the time of the funeral, people say it has been very easy to get lost in this area.[7]

[6] See http://sagnagrunnur.com. Terry Gunnell, professor emeritus of folkloristics at the University of Iceland, started the legend database 1999. The database has been restructured in close cooperation with Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir and Trausti Dagsson at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavík and now includes geographical mapping of a large number of the place names.

[7] Translation by Gunnell 2017, 3–4 from the original Icelandic text in Einar Guðmundsson 1932, I:12–17.

In the liminal space of the beach, the locals, presented with the moral dilemma of ethical respect for the deceased's belongings, pitted against the survival instincts of the living in a place where everything that washed ashore was utilised, the added layer of foreign uncanniness expresses racist and xenophobic attitudes and a deep-set fear of the unknown.

An interesting comparison may be drawn from more contemporary legends and personal experience narratives from recent fieldwork in the Strandir region of Iceland. One group of narratives, told by Guðjón Kristinsson recounts the interactions between remote Icelandic farmers and fishermen and the combatants of the Second World War struggling off the Northwest Icelandic coast. These regional and familial tales were also narrated to storytelling participants as a representation of the characteristics of the people populating the, now mostly abandoned, northerly areas of the Westfjords. One narrative begins with a German-speaking worker on the farm suspiciously surveying the movement of ships on the horizon. Come morning, flashes of light are seen in the skyline followed by faint blasts and two days later the corpses of soldiers wash up on the shore along with various supplies. Among these supplies are nutritious biscuits and pills, that Guðjón states, had come to good use for all-night egg-collecting and bird hunting in steep cliffs (they were in fact amphetamines).

But the bodies of German soldiers are on the other hand left alone in fear of their ghosts and particularly the dead naval captain, who is deemed especially haunted. But when the occupying British force hear of the incident, they deputise the reluctant Icelanders to collect the captain's remains. But in their fear and haste the Icelanders instead collect a heap of whalebones causing great mirth on assembly and surprise as to how well the Germans had adapted to marine life, having grown finns. Humiliated by this a local sheriff makes sure that all the earthly remains are collected. As he proceeds to bury them he is interrupted by the appearance of a German naval ship in the bay. An admiral comes ashore and claims the bodies but the Icelandic leader claims that by law all that washes ashore in his land is his own property. And indeed, under threat of a whole navel fleet, the sheriff does not flinch until he has been paid the equivalent of numerous farmsteads.[8]

The presentation of the foreign bodies has much in common with the "Hairy man of Skarð," including a sense of fear of the supernatural, in particular the corporeal ghost, a sense of xenophobia and human-animal hybridity, although the latter is an instrument of jest. Indeed the whole narrative can be interpreted as a parody of moral ambiguity and parochialism. An integral part of the humour also lies in the incongruity that parochial regulations on property (all that washes ashore on the drift farm) also apply to human remains. These can also be seen as characterisations of the region's men, which a local narrator called with some warmth: "these wild beasts." These wild, archaic and masculine heroes, or antiheroes, retain control, or rather some sort of communion, with their wild northern nature successfully out-manoeuvring a foreign military presence.

[8] Guðjón Kristinsson's narration of this legend was first recorded in 1999 by Kristinn Schram (KS 99:8) (see also Kristinn Schram 2002) and again in 2022 as part of the Visitations project (BS/KS/MW:01).

A stark contrast in narrative style, experience, and apprehension of this landscape of fear, can be found in a recent account of a local woman's youth on the shores of Strandir. In an interview in 2011 Jóna Þórðardóttir gave a rich account of life, with her parents, on these northern beaches but stressed that "the shore gave us many things but during the war, it gave us mostly terror."[9] So while remembering various materials washing ashore, she mostly associated the beach during the Second World War with personal anxieties and particularly her mother's fear of coming across washed-up corpses. Her mother in fact would only collect driftwood from the shores when accompanied by her daughter, often firmly clasping young Jóna's hand. Washed up sea mines were also common in these parts at the time and she was warned not to touch strange objects on the beach. Once a mine had washed ashore in a bay further north. Jóna remembers meeting two soldiers arriving, from the occupying allied forces, who had been sent to disarm it. When they arrived on horseback she was working in the field with her father who gave them directions as well as his own pair of woolen mittens. She reminisces how miserable and out of place the soldiers looked, as they rode away, hunched up over their horses in the cold holding the reigns, each with a single mitten. This everyday personal experience narrative, while describing a comparable landscape in the same region and historical backdrop, differs in many ways from Guðjón's narrative. Not least for the fact that the shore is presented in a more sympathetic or even feminine context, or at least including the perspective of local women. It presents us with the beach as a border region between the familial domestic space on the one hand and a war-torn otherness on the other.

**(Super)natural Entities on the Peripheries**

This fearsome uncanniness is only accentuated when this contact zone is extended into the sea ice of historically cold winters. As attested to in sagas, medieval annals, traditional as well as modern legends the frozen fjord was known to forebode polar bear arrivals and was also ventured out on by humans (see Bower and Schram 2021, 66–68). An examination of the associations made between bears and other beings helps us further understand the space they have occupied in the cultural imagination over the years. In sources collected during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we see bears occupy the same imaginative and real spaces as supernatural creatures of land and sea. An early example is to be found in *Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfífls*, which tells of a fight between Gunnar and two troll women over a dead bear. Gunnar cut the hand and head off of one troll, and the other surrendered (Jóhannes Halldórsson 1959, 358–59). The setting of this encounter is not named, but descriptions of a glacial landscape to the west of Iceland indicate strongly that it is Greenland.[10] The nineteenth-century folklore collector Gísli Konráðsson likewise details the thirteenth-century Landa-Hrólfr's killing

[9] The audio-visual recorded interview by Kristinn Schram and Katla Kjartansdóttir took place in the summer of 2011 at Jóna Þórðardóttir's home in Hólmavík (KS/KK 22).

[10] Grove (2009, 37) notes similarities with the landscapes described in *Flóamanna saga*, *Króka-Refs saga* and *Bárðar saga*.

of a troll woman who attempted to take a dead bear from him in Greenland (Hannes Þorsteinsson et al. 1935–1936, II:9).

Tales of troll women's attempts to hunt polar bears are also to be found in *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*. In two separate legends, trolls and bears are placed in the same physical space as attempted hunts are imposed onto the landscape in stone and solidified further by placenames; Hvítbjarnarey in reference to a polar bear and Hremmuháls in reference to a troll (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:197, 203–4). In Sigfús Sigfússon's *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir*, Eiríkur in Snæhvammur is described as killing, among other beings, a polar bear and a male troll (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, I:54–58). A further narrative from Hornstrandir tells of Dýra-Steinþór, a legendary huntsman who faced off bears and a troll woman. Like her counterpart in *Gunnars saga*, the troll who encountered Steinþór also lost a hand. Steinþór eventually died as he felled his nineteenth bear. A belief in bad luck associated with a specific number of bears killed is attested to in other bear legends (see further Kristinn Schram and Jón Jónsson 2019, 153). In the version of the legend attributed to Þórður Þ. *Grunnvíkingur* (b. 1878, d. 1913), an artwork is described depicting Dýra-Steinþór, 19 bears, a troll woman's hand and a spear. The artwork was still in existence in Strandir around 1870. A similar description of the artwork is given in an afternote and attributed to Hansína Tómasdóttir (b. 1850, d. 1933) from Grunnavík, later a housewife at Marðareyri, Jökulfirðir (Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason and Oddur Gíslason 1954–1959, II:I, 13–19).

In these examples, we see how in the imaginations of Icelanders from medieval times until the nineteenth century, trolls and bears have shared the same space. These supernatural encounters are physically mapped onto the landscape and then reimagined through the creative mediums of storytelling and visual art. This shared space is distinct from that inhabited by the narrators' communities and is often situated on northern and/or western peripheries. While bears may appear alongside female supernatural 'others,' human visitors are predominantly male. Degrees of familiarity with the landscape described differ, as settings range from foreign lands requiring days of travel, to areas visible from settlements. In the case of the Dýra-Steinþór legends, historic settlements are said to have become uninhabited as a result of the threat posed by bears. The community defended by Dýra-Steinþór is not the only example of an uninhabited settlement, or *eyðibýli*, explained by bear attacks in legend. Other examples include Keflavík and Þeistareykir in Northeastern Iceland, with the latter farm also being associated with ghostly hauntings (Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, II:294; Þorsteinn M. Jónsson, 1964–1965, III:188–91). Explanatory legends for depopulation which centre around supernatural and natural threats in the local environment can be understood as creative reactions to a phenomenon described by Yi-Fu Tuan as landscapes of fear. These landscapes, writes Tuan, are "the almost infinite manifestations of the forces for chaos, natural and human. Forces for chaos being omnipresent, human attempts to control them are also omnipresent" (Tuan 2013, 6).

Storytellers also employ connections with supernatural water dwellers to explore less palatable emotions associated with bear arrivals. This is particularly apparent in the narrative tradition found in areas which have historically been vulnerable to polar bear

arrivals. A clear example from Melrakkaslétta, in Iceland's Northeast, is the legend of Jón *höfuðsmaður*, preserved both in Sigfús Sigfússon's folk narrative corpus and in a tape-recorded interview taken with Andrea Jónsdóttir (1902–1990). The legend tells of how Jón would walk far across sea ice, killing polar bears with a bear sword he kept at his hip. In keeping with a belief often mentioned in bear legends, the eighteenth bear he tried to kill brought him bad luck, leaving him permanently disabled. He turned his attention instead to shipbuilding and was finishing work one evening on a Sunday running up to Christmas. It was then that he saw "some creature drag itself up from the sea." The creature is identified as a *hafmaður*, a human-like sea creature, also called *sjómaður*.[11] The two fight until the *hafmaður* returns to the sea, leaving a trail of blood, and Jón to his bed only to die three days later from his injuries (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, IV:45–47). In Andrea Jónsdóttir's interview, she tells of how bear-killing duties fell to Jón *höfuðmaður*'s son after he had killed his nineteenth bear, as it was bad luck to kill the twentieth. His son, Jón *forvitni*, had a daughter called Sigríður who was playing in the moonlight one evening in good weather when she saw a monstrosity in the likeness of a man coming towards her. The being is described as having arms so long they reached the ground even though it walked upright. Jón *forvitni* took a decision not to kill it, saying that despite his experience killing bears, he did not know how this creature would respond.[12] In both narratives, we see similarities between a bear and *hafmaður* not only in the people called on to kill them, as we do with trolls, but also in their relationship to the landscape. One *hafmaður* emerges from the Arctic Sea in the winter, while the second tale takes place in a similar location in a twilight setting which is indicative of autumn, winter or early spring. They inhabit the same realm and both pose a threat to even the most capable hunters.

Associations between sea-dwelling supernatural beings and bears are also to be found in two tape-recorded interviews from Northeast and East Iceland about sightings of unusual beasts in water. Þuríður Vilhjálmsdóttir (1889–1980), whose son Sigtryggur was interviewed during fieldwork for this project, told of a sighting on Langanes. She says that people had later been told that a sea otter had washed up or come to land in Vopnafjörður, further south along Iceland's east coast. She says that people had at first believed it to be "some sea monster or even a bear."[13] A narrator from East Iceland of the same generation as Þuríður, Gísli Helgason (1881–1964), tells of a strange sighting in Urriðavatn during the year of his birth. The animal was seen by many people and identified as a *nykur* (a horse-like water creature). In his rendition, the bear is used as a natural explanation for what was first believed to be a supernatural phenomenon as he ends the story with the words:

[11] Terry Gunnell has argued that legends about sea-men differ from those of sea trolls in the sense that one should avoid offending them at all costs (Gunnell 2017, 17).
[12] SÁM 91/2458 EF.
[13] SÁM 92/2755 EF.

> It was quite a common belief in those days. But it is known that that winter, '81, bears came onto land in many places here, it was all covered in sea ice and it was probably a bear that was on the move there.[14]

The idea that descriptions of water-dwelling monsters could have their roots in encounters with polar bears has also been put forth by Gunnell (2017, 16), although he says that few descriptions of such monsters seem to fit either bears or walruses entirely. Even when the two phenomena are not explicitly connected by narrators, associations are sometimes made between supernatural and natural inhabitants of the sea in the way that narratives are related to the listener. One Westfjords informant, Þorvaldur Magnússon (1895–1976), was asked by the collector Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson about sea monsters. After telling a story, he changed the topic to polar bears on his own initiative:

> It happened for example when there was ice and such, [that] there were polar bears who came onto land there.[15]

In an interview taken during fieldwork in 2020, a narrator responded to a question about bear legends in the Hornstrandir region with a discussion about the supernatural. The informant, Reimar Vilmundarson (b. 1972), belongs to the second generation of people from Hornstrandir, which is now a national park. He had never experienced year-round habitation in the area during his own lifetime but has always travelled regularly to his family's land in Bolungarvík in the North Strandir region. Following on from the interviewer's (Alice Bower) comments about Dýra-Steinþór and other local folktales, Reimar said that as a child, he was always scared of ghosts in animal form, adding: "I can assert that Hornstrandir is haunted."[16] He proceeded to relate an experience from his childhood, in the autumn of 1985, when he saw shadows and heard voices of his father and a relative talking about newly washed-up driftwood. When the two visible versions of the men returned, they spoke the same words. He connected this experience to the concept of *fylgja* ('attendant spirit').[17] It is interesting to consider the role that the landscape plays in his narrative. He talks about *fylgjur* having been in his father's family, but the description itself ties the experience very strongly to this area. The idea that Hornstrandir is haunted appears in a nineteenth-century narrative which attributes this to *bjargbúar* ('cliff-dwellers'), *álfar* (elves), sea ghosts and sea monsters (Hannes Þorsteinsson et al. 1935–1936, II:5). As a narrator, Reimar often described his environment in Hornstrandir from a child's perspective, in a way that was characterised by both fear and excitement. He described himself as being very scared in response to his experience of the *fylgjur*, yet in a different story he talks about his excitement at the prospect that a bear could come to land during one unusually cold winter in the 1980s.

[14] SÁM 84/14 EF.
[15] SÁM 90/2149 EF.
[16] V:AEP/VO:34.
[17] The *fylgja* phenomenon has been identified in both old and modern Icelandic sources and has been translated into English as both 'attendant spirit' and 'guardian spirit.' (Turville-Petre 1937, 119–26). A discussion of belief in *fylgjur* in modern times is to be found in Gunnell 2024, 661.

This is contrasted with his parents' anticipation of the threat, which fits very well with Tuan's notion of landscapes of fear. Reimar said: "dad's gun was behind the door for if a bear should come."[18] In Reimar's account of life in Hornstrandir, we see a chaotic landscape described in a way that seeks inspiration from his perspective as a child. Running parallel is an admiration for the area: "but you see all sorts in Hornstrandir. It's a mysterious (*dulmagnað*) and exciting place."[19]

**Natural Hazards, Big and Small**

The site of the historic farm Keflavík stands on the northern part of Látraströnd, a coastline to the east of Eyjafjörður in North Iceland which is now almost entirely depopulated. Two legends in Ólafur Davíðsson's folktale collection *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* portray Keflavík as a farm so isolated that months passed before visitors from nearby Látrar found its inhabitants long dead. The culprits were natural, non-human beings to which Keflavík's remoteness had rendered them particularly vulnerable. In one legend, the destructive force was a pack of six polar bears. A worker who had been sent from Látrar on skis saw them heading away from the empty farm and out onto the ice, in a line headed by the largest (Ólafur Davíðsson, 1978–1980, II:294). In the other legend about Keflavík, the culprit was not visible to the naked eye. An unnamed illness had killed the farmers, leaving their eight-year-old daughter the sole survivor (Ólafur Davíðsson, 1978–1980, III:44–46).

Keflavík is only one example of the same remote setting being used in legends of both polar bears and other, more familiar, natural phenomena that have the potential to decimate whole households. In the legend of Álfsstaðir, a vicious bear is believed to have made its way to the farm by heading south over a mountain pass from Furufjörður in Hornstrandir (Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason and Oddur Gíslason 1954–1959, III:II, 59–62). As with Keflavík, a quick glance at other narrative sources on the same places betrays a strong awareness of different types of natural threats to human habitation in the landscape, as Álfsstaðir's last inhabitants are said to have died in bad weather on the same mountain pass travelled by the legendary bear (Helgi Guðmundsson and Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason, 1933–1949, II:268–69).

Undoubtedly, nineteenth- and twentieth-century polar bear legends express fear of bears in a literal sense. In Iceland's north, polar bear arrivals are an uncommon yet real possibility, with unusually cold winters such as 1881–1882 and 1917–1918 sparking multiple arrivals. Polar bears do not only arrive on Icelandic farms during winter, however. Concerns about the unpredictable nature of these arrivals are still relevant today and were a common theme in fieldwork we undertook in the summer of 2020. The farmers Steinn Rögnvaldsson and Merete Rabölle at Hraun in Skagi experienced the arrival of a bear on their land in the summer of 2008, shortly after another had been found on the nearby mountain pass Þverárfjallsvegur. Steinn described being surprised to have encountered a bear so soon after the first arrival, at a time of year when there

[18] V:AEP/VO:34.
[19] V:AEP/VO:34.

was no sea ice.[20] A couple from Þistilfjörður, Ómar Vilberg Reynisson and Daníel Hansen describe how a bear surfaced at a nearby farm in 2010 and disappeared into the fog, only to reappear before Ómar as he was out with his sheep. Ómar's description of his encounter evoked feelings of chaos and confusion in the interviewer (Alice Bower), followed by a sense of eerie calm. He told of how his leader sheep (*forystufé*) had started herding the others, as if in response to something which he could not yet sense. By the time he registered the bear's presence in front of him, about five minutes after the sheep's first reaction, Ómar describes not having been able to escape it. Both Ómar and Daníel describe how they would then separately have a chance to come close to the bear once it had been shot, taking note of its size, weight, texture and a strange absence of smell.[21]

Human attempts to control these chaotic occurrences, both pre-emptive and reactive, are abundant in narratives old and new. From the deliberate addition of unnecessary bends in Grímsey turf houses to specially licensed machine guns, narratives tell of countless measures to deter, repel and combat polar bears.[22] In recent years, the focal point of this struggle has extended beyond the bears and the landscapes they emerge from, now incorporating their microscopic passengers. From the mid-century onwards, growing awareness of trichinella and other diseases has impacted how narrators relay encounters with bears. Accounts written prior demonstrate that this was often not the case in the past, as narrators describing rare nineteenth and early twentieth century incidents of bear meat consumption primarily note concerns about taste and texture.[23] As recently as 1963, the sale of the meat of a bear killed in Hornstrandir was stopped by authorities. One of the men involved, Stígur Stígsson, described how they had had no knowledge of the threat posed by trichinella. He told of how they had been "so crazy" as to skin the bear "like a sheep," as they were "only thinking that we wanted to take the meat."[24]

Some interviewees connected with twenty-first-century arrivals discussed concerns about contagion from bears. It was clear that they did not associate biological contamination with the bears' land of origin, Greenland, placing the issue closer to home. Farmers Steinn and Merete and former chief of police in Skagafjörður Stefán Vagn Stefánsson mentioned fears of contagion from the marine environment and Iceland as a key factor in the Greenlandic authorities' resistance to the prospect of receiving the polar bear that had surfaced at Hraun back onto their territory.[25] Stefán Vagn mentioned the possibility of infections which are present in Iceland and not in Greenland, as well as questions about what the bear had eaten and its condition. Merete and Steinn, who had prior experience of cooperation with Greenlandic farmers, light-heartedly supported their characterisation of Greenlanders as being wary of contagion with an anecdote of

[20] V:AEP/AFH/KS:17.
[21] V:AEP:22.
[22] Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, II: 292; V:AEP/AFH/KS/VO:07.
[23] Guðmundur Guðmundsson 1967, 79-81; Ármann Halldórsson 1979, 136.
[24] V:AEP:33. See also Bower & Schram 2022, 11–12.
[25] V:AEP/AFH/KS:17; V:AEP/KS:20.

the opposition Merete had faced when she raised the idea of importing frozen Icelandic rams' semen to prevent inbreeding.[26]

The landscape of fear described in the narratives discussed here presents us with natureculture entanglements that run far back to the beginning of human settlement in Iceland and even before it. While the recent ethnographic examples are taken mostly from remote Northern regions in Iceland, where currents have brought their various *flotsam* and *jetsam,* they are clearly part of transnational and transarctic human and non-human networks. Within them, flora and fauna, macro and micro, are mobile agentic assemblages that influence courses of events over a large area ranging from Siberia to Greenland and Inuit Nunangat. While these assemblages do not 'respect' national borders, the shore, in the human imaginary, is apprehended as a border zone. The liminal (foreign) body washed up on the shore, as Gunnell points out, is trapped within and so between different worlds. Furthermore, it is enmeshed in the landscape, from which it takes its supernatural and naturecultural attributes. Within this local environment, supernatural and natural threats are met with creative reactions which include storytelling, precautionary and religious practice and other human attempts to control what they perceive as manifestations of the forces for chaos. As attempted here, folkloristic enquiry and ethnography can therefore be useful in exploring these entanglements, not least in the study of narratives and narrators that themselves question ontological assumptions and established boundaries.

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V = Reykjavík, Visitations: Polar Bears out of Place Project Database. Audio recordings AEP/AFH/KS/VO:07; AEP/AFH/KS:17; AEP/KS:20; AEP:22; AEP:33; AEP/VO:34; BS/KS/MW:01.

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# MAGIC PRACTICES AND BELIEFS IN THE NOWADAYS LITHUANIAN VILLAGE COMMUNITIES

Lina Būgienė[*]

This article focuses on the narratives related to the magical harm recorded in different regions of Lithuania in the course of several folklore fieldwork sessions organised between 2007 and 2010 by the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore. The materials have been gathered by conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews, asking the informants not only to tell their stories but also to reflect on them. Thus, the subject of the article consists of numerous sound recordings that are sometimes several hours long, comprising dialogues between the folklorists and their informants, developing into either consistent or rather sketchy life stories, interspersed with discussions on various everyday matters, remarks, jokes, etc. In this miscellaneous speech flow, sometimes even classical folk-belief legends do appear; however, the major part of the mythical information is presented in stories about peculiar personal experiences, or reiterations of once-heard belief narratives followed by reflections on whether or not this could have been true, why this could have happened, etc. Such erratic data on vernacular beliefs and magical practices is generously supplemented with abundant and varied contextual information. One cannot help but notice that such free and open (if one is lucky!) communication between the folklorist and the informant rather resembles what Linda Dégh has termed as *constant flux*, maintaining it to be the natural way of the legend's existence:

> The legend emerges from pertinent historic, social, cultural situations created by single individuals while travelling through alternating oral and non-oral vehicles, constructing and integrating new conduits. It is not the story plot that has fixity, but the core idea of the story; therefore, it can be told in many other ways and means than prose narration. I found that this freedom of movement of core ideas gives wings to the legend and helps its proliferation in our

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> time. How can one overlook the fact that the legend does not have the well-tailored form of the fictional folktale? The legend is more content than form because it is built on facts of the real world and addresses questions concerning existential problems of real people. The proposition of the tale is to tell a lie, to fantasise; that of the legend is to interpret observed experience. (Dégh 1991, 19–20)

Further, I am going to concentrate on certain aspects of the phenomenon that our informants would frequently define as witchcraft, and which they claim either having experienced themselves or remembering from stories by their elders. Witchcraft (*raganavimas* in Lithuanian, sometimes also called *čerėjimas, burtininkavimas* 'casting spells, sorcery,' or simply – *žinojimas* 'knowing') is still very vivid in the Lithuanian countryside even in the beginning of the twenty-first century, as our fieldwork material gives ample evidence. Witches, sorcerers, or people with an evil eye seem much more persistent characters of vernacular belief than other figures of the ancient mythical lore; this is probably because of the fact that the former embody the real members of the community rather than peculiar creatures of imagination. Moreover, due to their unusual features of appearance or behaviour, these members of the community are ascribed the outstanding abilities to harm or aid others, i.e. by means unavailable to others affecting the social relationships, property and destiny of their own and others.

## The Category of *Other* in the Context of Witchcraft

As noted by numerous researchers, the Lithuanian witches (sg. *ragana*, pl. *raganos*), although having always been among the most popular figures of vernacular belief, in general have very few 'national' features: the same traditional stories about witchcraft are popular not only among Lithuanians, but among other peoples as well (Vėlius 1977, 218–19). This has led researchers to ascertain that ethnicity cannot be regarded as an essential factor in relation to witchcraft, since the latter is a universal phenomenon rather than one determined by some Lithuanian, Western European, or even Christian prerequisites (Beresnevičius and Čaplinskas 2001, 557–58). However, aspects of ethnicity and confession become very important in terms of establishing who is dubbed a witch, or accused of exercising magical harmful powers. As a rule, such accusations in the traditional peasant community used to be directed against individuals that were not its 'proper' members, but rather outsiders in terms of their occupation (soldiers, musicians, millers, etc.) or ethnicity (Russians, Latvians, Hungarians, Roma, etc., see Vėlius 1977, 237). The category of ethnic or confessional *other* was indeed crucial in this regard: according to ethnologist Laima Anglickienė, "all the foreigners living in Lithuania were believed to exercise magic powers," while the ethnic identity of a given witch or sorcerer would depend on "what kind of foreigners were present in the environment of the peasants living in the region" (2006, 76–83).

According to our fieldwork materials from northern Lithuania bordering Latvia, it is Latvians who were most frequently accused of magic (cf. Daugirdaitė 2007, 248): they

could cast spells on domestic animals (179/53/)[1] or take away the cows' milk (173/22/). In order to do that, one had only to know Latvian prayers and have a thread that was used to circle a deceased person three times, or simply to lend something (180/19/). According to our informants, only the person who took away the milk could also repair the damage (180/20/). Besides, the Latvians are said not to lock their doors: they just cast a spell, and nobody is able to steal anything from them (179/15, 50/). Once a Latvian is said to have bewitched somebody whom he believed had stolen his suitcase; the perpetrator was obliged to return to Riga and make amends (179/12). Another Latvian is said to have cast spells on Lithuanians because their kids mocked him; they could not then return home, because the horses stalled. Curiously, in this case, only another elderly Latvian was able to help them (179/13/). Latvians are believed to still practice magic, and people approach them in order to have somebody cursed or freed from the curse (179/14/). Another Latvian sorcerer is said to have been able to find a missing dog (182/27/). Latvians are said to possess the 'black books' (179/27/) and to practice charming (179/28/) as well. Therefore, Lithuanians claim to be afraid of the Latvians (179/39/).

In southern Lithuania (as elsewhere), primarily the Roma are accused of practising various magic tricks; particularly the Roma women are considered dangerous: when reading one's palm, they can allegedly take away one's fortune. The Roma would read cards and tell fortunes (299/10/), but more frequently just cheat or steal (241/17/, 408/19/, 424/6/, 458/8/). An interesting observation here is that the Roma used to be regarded as semi-professional magicians all over Europe; their activities were even related to the origins of witchcraft as such (Leland 2014 [1891]). In Lithuania, however, the Roma are sometimes believed to tell the truth (454/2/): e.g., one Roma woman saw in her cards that a man was married; another one predicted that a certain family would escape deportation to Siberia – and that appeared to be true (239/20/). The Roma could predict that a girl would marry only a widower (239/21/), or that a woman would have more children (238/14/). In addition, the Roma women are widely believed to be able to induce mice to infest a certain household if they are angered or spurned (240/15/, 400/1/, 408/19/, 456/15/). Curiously enough, quite a similar power is often ascribed to the pregnant women (386/12/, 400/1/, 482/4, 8/).

In eastern Lithuania, the capacity to inflict magic harm or harbour malicious intents in general is often blamed on the 'Old Believers' (sometimes called just Russians) or Belorussians. The 'Old Believers' are said to have practised black magic from ancient times: they would take away the cows' milk, undo one's fortunes, and so on (304/1/). The Russians would possess the 'black books' (304/2/) and evil eyes (306/15/, 312/ 5/, 471/6/). Moreover, the 'Old Believers' are depicted as superstitious, secretive, and leery; one woman is described as wary of lending her cup for the travellers to drink some water (313/12/) – this is also interpreted as incomprehensible caution on her part. The Russians (i.e. the local 'Old Believers') were so feared for their magical powers, that people even

[1] While referring to the fieldwork materials, the first figure indicates the number of the sound recording (cd) stored in the Lithuanian Folklore Archives of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, while the figure(s) between slashes indicate the number(s) of the episode(s) in that recording.

avoided crossing their village; or at least would place a silver coin in their shoe for protection. This was especially dangerous during weddings; once the bride and groom even walked around this village on foot, in order to avoid being harmed (458/6/). In addition, the Belorussians in this region are depicted in a similar manner as the above-mentioned Latvians in northern Lithuania: they are believed to possess magical knowledge (332/5/), to practice sorcery, to be able to take away or restore the cows' milk (399/5/), etc. All this data clearly testifies to the presence of the opposition between *one's own* and *other*, which is firmly established in the collective worldview of the peasant community.

## The *Neighbourhood Witch* in the Nowadays Village Community

It could safely be stated that most of our fieldwork materials on sorcery, evil eye and other kinds of magical harm belong to the sphere of activity of the *neighbourhood witches*, as described by the Slovenian folklorist Mirjam Mencej (2006; 2017). This phenomenon (along with another kind – the *village witches*) reflects various social tensions in the community: namely, envy, anger, malevolence, and hatred between neighbours. It is also rooted in the concept of the *other*, however, in the social and territorial sense: "the witch was an incarnation of the Other, the agent of evil, the 'enemy within'" (Mencej 2017, 113, 403). Vicious or envious neighbours (particularly women) are often blamed for various household misfortunes, poor harvests, ailing or dying animals, i.e. for threatening one's property and social status; at the same time, this provides "people with a means of channelling repressed hostility, frustration, and anxiety" (Mencej 2017, 113). In addition, however, this image of the witches taking away people's property (e.g., the cows' milk) and accumulating wealth is related to the concept of 'limited good' (Foster 1965), which is grounded in an assumption of there being a definite quantity of goods in the community, thus someone's enrichment is bound to mean destitution for others. This concept constitutes the basis for the images of some other mythical beings as well (see Būgienė 2011). In the case of witches, however, the attitudes differ: some informants claim that sorcerers are indeed faring better economically (184/14/), while others do not believe this, presenting critical arguments that lazy or negligent people devise such kind of stories in order to justify themselves (245/11/). Some informants even maintain that good fortune is connected to not envying others (183/39/).

According to ethnological and anthropological research, envy, especially among neighbours, is the most feared emotion, to which people ascribe the greatest destructive power and which is firmly associated with witchcraft. The concept of envy in the peasant community is wider than just an emotion:

> [It] is one of the central concepts of the peasant's worldview. It is nothing less than the principle of evil, an uncontrollable force. […] it does not exist only inside the person who feels it, but is more a relationship between the person who generates it and the person who suffers due to its effects. The power of envy is destructive and is considered the main reason for misfortune: if misfortune occurs, there must invariably be envy. (Mencej 2017, 116–17)

The connection between envy and magical harm, or witchcraft, seems to be a universal one; it is especially striking in the closely settled village communities, the members of which cannot avoid their neighbours in case of conflict, relocating somewhere else (Beresnevičius and Čaplinskas 2001, 562–63; Briggs 2002, 1–2).

Our fieldwork materials also testify to the frequent, if not unanimous, manifestation of certain social tensions in folklore, both when talking of the present or when vividly remembering the informants' youth or childhood. The most numerous cases of witchcraft in Lithuanian folklore are related to tending livestock and dairy production, which was predominantly the economic sphere of women; notably, witchcraft is also primarily associated with women. Stories about stealing the cows' milk are most frequently associated with St John's Day; during that time, the witches were believed to be particularly active. They could appear, for instance, in the shape of a toad; this would prompt people to dub the encountered toads 'sorcerers' (342/6/). Having found a toad close to their cows, people would suspect somebody trying to steal the milk; after such a toad was hanged, the witch would suffer greatly (386/10/). Toads are regarded as typical animal helpers of witches in many countries, including Slovenia (Mencej 2017, 168). Early in the morning of St John's, and sometimes also on St Peter's Day, people tried to protect their cows from sorcery and evil eye: they would keep them longer in the sheds (408/10/, 409/7/, 454/1/). However, sometimes even such a delay could cause conflicts between neighbours. One woman told a detailed and elaborate story about her female neighbour who would purposely wait for her to take cattle out to pasture, and only then let out her own cows from the shed, expecting the informant's animals to suffer whatever magical harm could still be there in effect (333/3/).

Stories of the witches harming cows on St John's Day are abundant in all Lithuanian regions. Women would avoid showing the quantity of milk to each other, covering the buckets with scarves in order to hide it (399/5/). However, perhaps the most popular type of story features charms being uttered when drawing a bridle, or a piece of cloth, a towel or something else across the pasture, gathering the dew and saying "half to me" (thus taking away part of the milk). Typically, someone accidentally hearing this is depicted to repeat the actions saying "all to me," thus inadvertently making the neighbours' cows completely barren, while the cloth used for the charming is dripping milk (373/1/, 430/3/, 431/7/, 456/4/, 458/6/, 465/1/; see Vėlius 1977, 228; Balys 2002, 211). Sometimes such firm belief in the malevolent activities during St John's Day could result in utterly tragic situations when the suspected perpetrator was severely beaten or even killed (176/18/, 180/16/, 431/7/). These stories reflect the extent of panic and anger overwhelming the community members directly encountering the alleged witchcraft. According to historians, numerous witches did not even make it to the court trials precisely because of such spontaneous lynching (Beresnevičius and Čaplinskas 2001, 567–68).

Our materials reveal that diminished quantity of milk following the St John's was regarded as an almost universal and natural thing: the grass would become thinner, the quality of pastures worsened, etc. (466/5/, 479/9/). However, if somebody would still have plenty of milk (or even more than before), others would inevitably suspect such a

person of witchcraft. One such witch who always had a lot of milk is depicted as suffering an incredibly difficult and cruel death at the end of her life, with milk spurting from her fingers and her cow bellowing violently during her funeral (482/1/). In some cases, the possible magical harm would be suspected only much later: the allegedly barren cow would be sold, and only afterwards it would appear that it was bewitched (184/11/).

It could be concluded that envy and rivalry for the allegedly limited resources must have caused the appearance and persistence of these beliefs and stories about witches as cattle-harming and milk-stealing envious neighbours. It should be noted, however, that not a single one of these stories reflects the perspective of the accused: as in most other cases in folklore, the witch is either not named at all, or remains voiceless (Favret-Saada 1980, 24, 161; Mencej 2017, 176).

The reasons for the neighbourly discord may vary; they frequently include family relationships, particularly marriage. However, the *neighbourhood witch* is sometimes believed to cause harm out of pure spite, for no obvious reason or purpose (384/14/). Weddings constitute a particularly favoured arena for exercising witchcraft (430/10/, 454/4/, 465/6, 12/); this is perhaps due to the entrenched mythical belief that a wedding presents a certain liminal situation when the young couple is particularly vulnerable. Combined with the established ancient practice of arranged marriages, when the future spouse was selected with regard to economic considerations rather than mutual love and emotions (Mencej 2017, 121–27), this makes a particularly favourable sphere for magic to thrive. In Lithuanian folklore, the corpus of magical beliefs also includes popular legends about musicians playing at the enchanted wedding with the devils present (Balys 2002, 182). We were able to record such legends as late as the beginning of the 21st century; moreover, the informants presented them as personal stories of the things that had allegedly happened to their father or a relative who was a musician (344/6–8/, 386/5/). The cursed wedding party needs a sorcerer or a charmer to free them from the spell (321/14/). Sometimes the conflict between neighbours even involves a priest, as in a story of a woman who was annoyed by her neighbour whom she suspected of trying to inflict her harm. This woman, an 'Old Believer,' decided to take twelve broken candles to the church in order to avenge her neighbour, but the priest did not allow this (304/3/). Yet another story related to love magic and magical revenge also features candles, a priest and an unwitcher (a benevolent sorcerer). A wronged girl secretly places at the boy's home, under the floor planks, two crossed candles, and thus the house becomes haunted. Weary of various strange sightings and sounds, its inhabitants address the priest, who informs them of a possible magic harm having been performed; however, it is the local sorcerer who is able to detect and remove the candles (386/14/).

It is noteworthy that love magic in the Lithuanian countryside is a second kind of magic in terms of popularity, right after harming the cattle. Among our fieldwork materials, numerous methods of divining one's future husband are described (322/1/, 332/4/, 453/2/, 459/6/, 469/11/, 480/11/), as well as means of seducing one's beloved or getting back one's unfaithful husband (211/10/, 432/17/, 456/6/, 487/6/), combined with

stories of a witch attempting to harm a married couple (454/4/) or casting a spell on a guy and making him fall in love with a certain girl – this does not usually end well, however (321/16/, 332/5/). Certainly, all this material is also related to envy and rivalry between the community members.

Curiously enough, certain practices that would seem meaningless or neutral, tend to be perceived as harmful or malevolent in the context of witchcraft, e.g., an old woman walking around the cows is suspected to have cursed them (304/1/), a woman praising a piglet is believed to make it ill (479/6/), or the one kissing a girl farewell is accused of harming her (480/4/); likewise, a woman praising a bathed baby raises suspicions of having made it ill and die, although the informant telling this story goes on to reason that perhaps the baby was inadvertently placed by an open window and caught a cold (482/1/). In general, praising an animal or a baby was regarded as part of the vernacular belief complex related to the *evil eye*: this was a way of inadvertently or purposely harming them. In spite of the evil eye beliefs having originally made a separate share of the vernacular tradition (cf. Dundes 1980), nowadays, exercising the evil eye also tends to be blamed on the witches – perhaps because it falls in line with their general proclivity to causing harm out of envy.

Another aspect that is tightly related to witchcraft involves borrowing or lending various things. It is almost unanimously believed that lending things to one's neighbour involves a huge risk of harming oneself. There are moments in time when lending anything is entirely out of bounds, e.g. during main religious festivals (339/7/) or when one's cow is calving (333/3/). A large number of taboos related to borrowing are connected to various prohibitions applied to pregnant women and their conduct. It is universally believed (especially in the eastern part of Lithuania) that one cannot refuse anything if a pregnant woman asks to lend her (304/9/, 386/12/, 400/1/, 482/4, 8/); on the other hand, people also expect the pregnant women to be aware of this and to act accordingly, avoiding awkward situations (323/11/, 336/3/, 339/7/). Some advise pregnant women not to borrow anything at all, because they can cause harm to their unborn child (342/13/, 421/1/, 471/1/, 482/3/). It should be noted in general, that due to their special situation, pregnant women are *de facto* like witches: they are able to easily cause harm both to themselves (or their future baby) and to others.

By the way, according to our informants, the *neighbourhood witch* is also very anxious to borrow something from her neighbours, if her victim receives help – from a charmer, a benevolent sorcerer, etc. In such cases, the witch is believed to suffer greatly. For her, borrowing something then is a means of restoring her curse; therefore the unwitcher usually advices their client to abstain from lending or giving things to anybody (184/9/, 304/1/, 386/18/); if this advice is not followed, the curse is back to place (456/3/). According to one informant, borrowing things in general was a method for the witches to take away the cows' milk (469/4/). Perhaps here the popular magic principle of *pars pro toto* is involved: having acquired a certain object that belongs to her victim, the witch then gains power over the whole property.

## The *Neighbourhood Witch:* Both Familiar and Foreign

What kind of neighbour is bound to be suspected of witchcraft, according to vernacular beliefs and popular stories? Usually, it is a female, and primarily – an envious one. Besides, she may be quarrelsome, sneaky, and treacherous. Sometimes an accusation of witchcraft may result from some earlier conflict (456/5/), however, much more frequently the informants emphasise having been totally unaware of any animosity on the part of their neighbours, rather to the contrary – having enjoyed quite friendly relations until the unexpected attempt to cause harm occurred. Indeed, the "strained relationships with the neighbors were not a necessary precondition for a witchcraft accusation to take place" (Mencej 2017, 119); and "for a witch to be chosen from among the neighbors, it was, on the contrary, necessary that they were not in an open conflict with the bewitched" (Favret-Saada 1989, 54), since it could raise doubts in the validity of the accusations. We have even recorded a suggestion that a suspected witch should be treated "with malice" – then they would not harm you, while if treated friendly, they might bewitch you (240/15/). This reminds observations by Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980, 194) maintaining that a successful unwitcher "must be capable of opposing the aggressor with an even more intense magic power" than that of the witch, and the traditional notions about successful charmers having "stronger" blood, or being "fiercer" in order to alleviate the illness or a curse (Būgienė 2010, 75; Vaitkevičienė 2014, 42). This "fierceness," intensity, or strength signifies here a greater spiritual power or energy.

Further, I would like to specifically dwell upon one excerpt from a narrative, which I think reveals particularly well what peculiarities of a suspected woman, in view of the narrator, allow assuming that she should be a witch:

> Here is this neighbour. She's got these huge, dirty nails on her fingers […] She lives over there, has four kids, and some man. They are not married, and their children are not baptised, no. Even the granddaughter is not baptised. […] That's the way she is. She goes to another church, I do not know what. Maybe to some 'Old Believers'? And she has those ugly, dirty fingernails […] She knows some gypsies. And she has this manner, if you said something to her […] I try to keep silent, not to enrage her. I do not quarrel, or anything. She used to help me sometimes with things […] She's such sort of a person. She associates with gypsies, [her children] have gypsy names. I try not to oppose her, because if you do, even if you say a rightful thing, they would dig you up even out of the earth […] (480/13/)

Afterwards, during her talk, the informant adds that this neighbour woman cohabits with a man from Azerbaijan, although they are not married, he has fathered her 'bastard kids;' and finally, for the third time already, describes her long, black and dirty fingernails. While listening to this description, one is inadvertently reminded of the stereotypical image of the witches, present in European culture ever since the sixteenth century: "they were said to be wrinkled, withered, curved, limping, without or with only a few teeth left […] In addition, they were often described as unpleasant looking: ugly, filthy, unkempt, with strange, sharp, snaky eyes, pointy chin, long hooked nose, with warts and scabs" (Mencej 2017, 318). However, it is perhaps even more important that

this woman seems both *familiar* to the informant (she lives nearby, the informant is obliged to frequently meet her and talk to her, she sometimes even helps to do some work, and, one way or another, this neighbour is a member of the village community) and rather *foreign* (repulsive looking, dirty, disregarding conventional morals, belonging to another confession or probably not religious at all, associating with foreigners – gypsies, Azerbaijani). Therefore she represents both sides of the existential division between *one's own* and *other*, dismantling in such a way the established order of things and instilling fear in others, who do not know how to treat such a person and what to expect from her. In my view, precisely this controversy, inspired by such a person who disrupts the established social categorisation forms the basis for the image of the *neighbourhood witch*, rousing fear and anxiety in the village community. Historian Giedrė Sabaitytė, having studied the records from the witch trials in Lithuania, draws rather similar conclusions:

> Alienation from one's own society is the first and essential step towards becoming a "marginal person," while the capacity of recognizing the "alien" among the "normal" is an essential turning point in this process. This is particularly significant in the witch persecution, since […] the witches were frequently indiscernible from the "normal" people neither in terms of their origins, status, nor activities. One had to possess certain outstanding qualities, sharpness, even heightened suspiciousness to be able to identify the 'black sheep' among the virtuous citizens (Sabaitytė 2010, 80).

Indeed, every *neighbourhood witch*, even if not conspicuous in any way (which happens fairly seldom, since suspicions of witchcraft, as a rule, entail discovering some strange, unpleasant or unacceptable features of the person), is both familiar – since she is a neighbour, – and foreign – since she belongs to the hostile supernatural sphere and does not adhere to the socially acceptable patterns of behaviour and activity. However, such individuals living outside of the standard social and cultural framework happen in every society, therefore belief in witchcraft is such a universal and persistent phenomenon.

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The survey of the fieldwork materials recorded in the first decade of the twenty-first century in different regions of Lithuania shows that various magic practices and beliefs, and witchcraft as a phenomenon, are very much alive in the traditional village communities. The main functions of witches still include harming the cattle (especially taking away the cows' milk) and love magic; however, a witch may be perceived as harming others without any particular reason – out of spite or envy. Peculiar aspects related to magic include borrowing and lending various things, as well as various taboos associated with the behaviour of pregnant women.

Both the historical materials from the witch trials and the fieldwork data reflecting the vernacular tradition suggest that the image of a witch rests upon an opposition between *one's own* and *other*. As a rule, accusations of witchcraft were directed at people

who were outsiders to the community (in terms of ethnicity, faith, or other respects), most frequently women. However, perhaps the most popular character of the nowadays vernacular tradition is the *neighbourhood witch*, who resides and functions very close to the informants, yet exhibits certain foreign and hostile features. In my view, precisely this paradox – the witch representing both sides of the binary opposition between *one's own* and *other*, thus dismantling the established social norms and rousing fear and anxiety in the community, – is essential in determining the exceptional longevity and popularity of the witch phenomenon.

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# VIOLENT SUPERNATURAL ENCOUNTERS IN CONTEMPORARY ESTONIAN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE NARRATIVES

Reet Hiiemäe*

**Introduction: Violent Supernatural Beings in the Context of the Estonian Twenty-First-Century Spiritual Milieu**

Folklorist Diane Goldstein notes that "despite generations of rationalism and the influence of the Enlightenment, consumers still buy into the supernatural" (Goldstein 2007, 2). According to modern neurotheology, supernatural beliefs are engrained in our brains (van Elk 2022, 1). Additionally, there has been no epoch in history when people have been indifferent to violence that threatens them. This article looks at the combination of both supernatural beings and violence as narrative material, focusing on the descriptions of personal encounters with physically aggressive supernatural beings in twenty-first-century Estonian narratives, placed against the backdrop of older narrative material. The author analyses how physical contact with something that is classically considered immaterial has been described in sensory terms, and how narrators have attempted to make sense of such experiences.

Estonian literature contains many different examples of supernatural beings. This article, while not exhaustive, examines a handful of narratives that depict nightmares, ghosts, supernatural energy robbers, or aliens in the aggressor role; of course, this selection is not exhaustive. It should be also noted that defining the term "supernatural" is ontologically problematic (cf. topical discussions in Northcote 2004; Clarke 2007; Raahauge 2016, 89) and depends on the denotations used by the narrators themselves. For instance, in some narratives aliens are noted as not being supernatural as they were considered to exist and to be an actual part of the natural world. Moreover, there are

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spiritual teachings that suggest humans themselves can also be viewed as extramundane or supernatural beings. In this article, the term "supernatural being" is understood as an incorporeal being believed to have powers to affect the course of human events (as defined in several dictionaries, e.g. vocabulary.com) with the reservation that in specific personal experience narratives, various formulations may be used, whereby rational and supernatural explanatory versions sometimes occur in parallel.

The term "violence" also needs some analytical contextualisation. Although in folklore, especially in legends embedded into moralising argumentations related to human behaviour that is viewed as violating some common norms, the violent intrusion into mundane life could be considered as one of the functions of the supernatural; however, in many contemporary narratives such causal reasoning doesn't come to fore. The twenty-first-century narrators expected violence from beings that they considered supernatural mainly because they just perceived these beings as the dangerous and powerful "Other" that is apt to violate the physical integrity of the human body. This seems to correlate with the findings of neuropsychiatry, which suggests that in certain conditions, people can interpret unliving objects as aggressive living entities, such as a shadow as an attacker (cf., Oakley and Malik 2011, 6).

Folklore, including belief narratives, is in interaction with spiritual teachings and religious trends as well as with changing conceptions of the self in the globalising world (cf. Bubandt 2012). At the same time, the universal character of certain folkloric ideas has been polarising in scholarly debates. According to David Hufford (1982), constant patterns common to all cultures can be identified in supernatural attacks – for example, the spontaneous and uncontrollable emergence of the experience. Folklore narratives that depict encounters with violent supernatural beings have existed for thousands of years. For instance, the Nordic *Laxdæla saga* contains episodes in which a ghost kills its former servants (The Laxdale Saga 1880). We can see similar themes in more contemporary narratives. Some nineteenth-century Estonian folklore depicts characters physically attacking ghosts, nightmares, forest spirits and devils. This continued in the twenty-first-century personal experience narratives. The motif index of Stith Thompson (1966) lists several narrative motives related to supernatural attack that are relevant here: Dead spouse's malevolent return (E221); Wandering ghost makes an attack (E261); and Nightmare presses a person in a dream (F471.1). However, there are some genre differences – generally, there are fewer descriptions of drastic violence perpetrated by supernatural beings in personal experience narratives.

Some authors (e.g. Mauritsen and van Mulukom 2023) have linked belief in the existence of supernatural beings and corresponding experiences to certain cognitive mechanisms, such as the tendency to perceive agency and purpose in the surrounding environment; however, they conceded that the content of such beliefs still depends on the social context. On the other hand, the social context also determines the ways of narrating, for example, the coexistence of scientific and religious reasoning processes in contemporary interpretations (cf. Legare and Visala 2011, 169). Although some folklorists and narrative researchers (e.g. Nicolaisen 1987, 69, Herman 2002) have argued that the core components of narratives describing encounters with supernatural beings

are also repetitive, it is difficult to distinguish to what extent do otherwise unique experiences become uniform over the course of storytelling that incorporates universal modes of description. Or, do similar experiences themselves – as Hufford (1982, 15–16) suggests – homogenise the ways in which they are narrated? For instance, Alasdair MacIntyre (1981, 212) has claimed that experiences often take the form of stories even before they become verbalised, especially if a corresponding narrative tradition has already developed in society. For example, Thomas Bullard (1989, 152) notes in the context of alien abduction narratives that if people experiencing unexplained bodily and visual sensations do not have a belief system that fits such an experience, they may adopt the interpretation that they fell victim to alien aggression based on information obtained from UFO-enthusiasts or respective literature. This is perhaps not so much because of firm conviction but rather because this interpretation gives them words and concepts to express the ineffable and grasp the incomprehensible.

A comparative study of the Estonian material shows that whichever creatures are believed to be attacking strongly depends on the belief tradition of a particular era. The range of supernatural beings depicted as violent has significantly decreased in the twenty-first-century material. Even the specific genre of horror stories that feature strangulation, cannibalism, blood drinking, etc. of the young school children was already exhausting itself at the end of the 1990s (cf. Kõiva 1996). However, according to a recent representative poll, about a third of people in Estonia continue to have experiences that they classify as supernatural, i.e. not rationally explainable (EKN 2020).

## Material and Methods

As source material for this article derived from contemporary folklore texts (mainly personal experience narratives) from the past decade describing encounters with violent supernatural beings, topical folklore from older traditions was also used as a reference (ca. 500 texts from Estonian Folklore Archives from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century along with examples from older chronicles and sagas for comparison). More contemporary beliefs in the supernatural can be assessed using sources like the 2018 School-lore questionnaire, which focused on the beliefs of Estonian school-aged children. Within the questionnaire were questions such as "What do you know of ghosts or UFO-s?", or "Have you ever been afraid of a supernatural being?" For the beliefs of contemporary adults, this article turned to threads from specific esoteric, as well as mainstream, internet forums discussing encounters with supernatural beings from 2013–2024, and interviews (ca. with 300 persons) about protective rituals from 2017–2023 that the author's students delivered as homework in the frames of courses on folk religion were used. Topical narratives were found by keyword search or by frontal reading. The focus is on the interpretations of the experiencers themselves, thus the article doesn't aim to find out if the described encounters objectively took place or not. In addition to methods from folkloristics (e.g. qualitative content and motif analysis, context and discourse analysis, historical comparisons) this analysis got inspiration from approaches from medical anthropology, media analysis and social psychology.

**About Shifts in Describing Supernatural Violence Over Time**

To exemplify continuities and changes, three older folklore texts containing detailed descriptions of brutal violence are presented below.

**Example 1.**
Once there was a shepherd boy who swore terribly, he said several thousand devils every day. One day the boy swears again awfully. Suddenly a big man with horns comes from the forest. The boy started running towards home, but with only a few steps the horny man was on his heels, grabbed the boy by his hair, took him to a place in the forest where there was a blue fire burning. Tore the boy's clothes off, burned his body with fire, saying: "I had to leave the wedding party of the landlord on island Hiiumaa because of you, you bastard!" He hung the boy on a tree, head upside down, where he stayed for three days until someone came to look for him and found him. Since then, the boy has never said a bad word. He also kept this in mind when grown-up.
(E 27525/6 (9) < Võnnu, 1896)

**Example 2.**
Seeing a water spirit. I went to catch crayfish downstream from the dam. A sack is hanging around my neck, I carry a burning wooden splint in my hand, crayfish crawl on the bottom of the river – you only need to pick them up. I'm near the shore under the trees, lighting a new splint – and I feel something around my leg. I have heard that there are worms in water, they can cling to your hand when you pick crayfish from their holes. I look around and see: a red dog is watching me, its tail around my leg, and draws me deeper and deeper into the water. I got terribly frightened, screamed: "Help, help!" I grabbed hold of a hanging alder tree growing on the shore, looked around, trembling – but couldn't see anyone. Yet my appetite for catching crayfish was gone forever, I'll no longer go to catch crayfish alone.
(ERA II 167, 524/6 (4) < Tallinn, 1937)

**Example 3.**
I also once had such a bad problem that a nightmare came to plague me. It was when I was still a young man and there was an old maid in our village, already over thirty, she wanted me very much, but I was young then and I was even scared of her, she was too old and already had something like moustache under her nose. It was Sunday morning, and I was lying around in the barn, my eyes open, I was awake and thinking about this marrying thing. Suddenly something like a roar starts and this old maid comes like a haystack and lands on me and wants to suffocate me. I even didn't dare to think about anything any longer and as the last resort I start reading Paternoster, then she went away. Later I saw her in the village and said: "Don't come to plague me, I wouldn't marry you anyway." So, she didn't come any more. […]

> They say that when you are able to shout or move yourself, the nightmare will go away.
> ERA II 183, 683/5 (17) < Koeru, 1838)

Example 1 can be classified as a legend, while examples 2 and 3 present a description of an immediate personal experience. As mentioned above, depictions of physical violence committed by supernatural beings are more common in material that has undergone a longer folklorisation process (as in example 1, where the victim is "a shepherd" with no direct link to the narrator). Descriptions of such a level of violence in modern material are rare, and the moralising note (as in example 1) occurs less often. At the same time, it seems that the fear of supernatural beings capable of physically attacking and harming a person has not decreased much, whereby the described *image* of such violence is often so vivid that it comes close to a *real experience* of violence. Instead of legends containing motives of brutal violence, today's intepretations of supernatural encounters are primarily inspired by mass media (e.g. coverage in the tabloid press, pop-culture screen products). Shifts in dominant markers can be observed even in a short timespan. In the 1990s in Estonia (as in many other Western countries), alien violence gained considerable attention in both personal experience narratives and media reports. As Thomas Bullard (1989, 165) notes, mass media undoubtedly played a decisive role in bringing the fundamental possibility of alien abduction to the consciousness of people. In the 1990s and early 2000s, poltergeist stories with a violent component rose to prominence in Estonia, occasionally making it to newspapers (e.g. Paas 2004) and even to children's folklore (cf. Kõiva 1995, 316); but, these began to quickly decrease soon after. There are also other changes in interpretation. For example, in older Estonian folklore, narratives of malicious spirit possession are rare (cf. about violent spirit possession elsewhere in Cohen and Barrett 2007; Igreja 2018), but through the growing popularity in horror media that depicts possession (e.g. through related TV series), some experiences have recently been also interpreted as spirit possession, for example:

> Semiprecious stones lay around in my house for protection and I have a personal stone that I carry all the time. The story of its origin is a year old – namely a horrible ghost had decided to hijack my body then. As I have been a victim of an evil spirit, I had [later] trouble with fear related to falling asleep but by now I have overcome this fear. I got help from two people who made their rituals to free me from this foreign energy. I had never thought that ghosts could be evil! (EFITA, S1, middle-aged woman, 2018)

At the same time, contemporary spiritual teachings emphase love, healing, well-being, self-development rituals and communication with protective beings (e.g. guardian angels, benevolent spirits of relatives, spirit animals), inspired by *new age*, oriental, Native American and new pagan practices that have become increasingly visible in mainstream culture (see more about spirituality trends in Estonia Hiiemäe 2020). TV series (e.g. *The Ordeal of Clairvoyants*, *Supernatural*), however, also mediate images of the darker, more violent, and sometimes even murderous side of the spirit world. Regardless of whether contact with a supernatural entity involves direct physical contact

or not, the experiencers often report strong bodily reactions such as palpitations, freezing, and shaking, which they sometimes attribute to fear and panic, but at other times to the presence of otherworldly energy. Although such perceptions represent a rather private and hidden world, certain explanatory models are visible in society (e.g. through internet forums and media outlets) and oftentimes narratively recycled.

In the following, I will take a closer look at some more common contemporary narrative outputs of supernatural violence experiences.

**Nightmare Experiences**

Nightmare attacks, which typically occur while the experiencer is alone and (almost) asleep, are often associated with supernatural violence in modern material. The descriptions of heavy bodily sensations related to nightmares have remained similar over time, often being characterised by a strong feeling of pressure, inability to move, breathing difficulties, sensations of pain and intense fear (Hiiemäe 2018, 292). Modern narratives sometimes—but rarely—paint a picture of highly physical combat, as in the following two examples shared on an internet forum of paranormal topics:

> It was a totally black man. Suddenly he just disappeared. There was a couple of minutes of peace. […] Then he came back, again sitting on me. Suddenly I feel that he grabs me on my clothes. I hit him anywhere (I couldn't see where) and I became free. He started to tear my clothes again. I don't know how, but after a long struggle, he went away. Suddenly he was just gone. I didn't know what it was and thought I was dreaming, but in the morning, I saw that someone had cut my nightgown as if with a knife.
> (EFITA, A1, woman, 2008)

A man also mentions similar powerful physicalness related to his experience:

> And there was an attack. We wrestled hard. I realistically felt that I was being tossed around in bed as it wanted. Once I was in one position, then again, my head was where my legs should be. But finally, I was able to press it under me, and I saw a completely faceless and shapeless figure. Suddenly, it started to transform into my ex-partner.
> (EFITA, R1, man, 2007)

Yet, the narratives more commonly refer to the victim's inability to move, as in the following example where the experiencer additionally tries to find a causal connection between her behaviour and the attack:

> A good female friend had only heard about nightmares and ghosts until the following happened to her. Alone at home, while taking a nap on the couch, she suddenly heard a quiet opening of the door and felt the air move. Then shuffling footsteps coming towards her. She couldn't move at all, was completely terrified, and then suddenly a weight fell on her, so oppressive that she couldn't breathe. In a frenzy of fear, the thought came that [her] grandmother had once said that with nightmares one should read the Paternoster. She, however, could not move or even make a peep, the weight bore down on her stomach and

> chest with tremendous force, until she was out of breath. With an effort she only managed to think "Amen" and suddenly the heaviness was gone. There was no one in the room, the door was still closed, she was all sweaty either from fear or from great effort. She could move her arms and legs and stand up. The crazy thing was that from then on, the nightmare started to haunt her every couple of weeks. […] The fear of the nightmare is huge, because she can't explain why it's happening, what it wants, or whether she herself has done something wrong and the nightmare is punishing her for it.
> (EFITA, M1, middle-aged woman, 2018).

More often than in older Estonian tradition, modern nightmare experiences contain a sexual aspect, which is mostly perceived as sexual violence because the victims feel having no control over what is happening to them. For example, interpretive patterns use references to the succubus and incubus motif, which is associated with demonic energy abduction during an erotic nightmare experience. In an internet forum discussion that led to the interpretation of a violent nocturnal visitor as an incubus, one user commented: "Incubus… it is no joke! It is a creature that sucks energy from us, the humans. It also 'rapes' in sleep but the main thing is that it 'eats you'" (EFITA, N1, 2010). In the same forum, a woman later described how she "in reality" felt "a demon-like creature" attacking her but wasn't sure if it was an incubus or just an erotic dream (EFITA, S2, woman, 2017). The coexistence of elements of beliefs from different times and cultures proves that in the age of information diversity, various belief traditions can be easily combined.

A few references to similar sexual encounters can also be found in material recorded 100–150 years ago, for example in one case a woman, interpreting her nightmare experience, assumes that it was a man whom she rejected in real life and who then came to forcefully hug her as a nightmare (ERA II 38, 695/6 (6) < Vaivara, 1931). However, sexual violence in nightmares can be traced back several centuries. In the 7th century in treatises circulating in Europe, there are descriptions of nightmare experiences containing sexual intercourse; the use of the term incubus (the male incarnation of a diabolical demon or a metamorphosis of the devil) and succubus (the female counterpart of the former) is documented from the twelfth century and later (cf. Davies 2003).

Unlike older narratives, modern interpretations leave it more open whether the nightmare experience was caused by another person, a supernatural being, or some medical condition, such as sleep paralysis (see more about medical argumentations in Davies 2003, or the combination of biological, psychological, medical, and cultural explanations in Milne 2008, 177, 184ff.). However, the motivation of the attacker is described similarly – it can be malice, revenge, envy, and sometimes also jealousy. The means of regaining safety are generally learned from the same sources as the fears and associated interpretations – primarily from the media, internet forums and narratives heard in family circles.

**Ghosts, Revenants, Energy Robbers**

In the 2000s, the series *Estonian Ghosts* aired on the Estonian TV channel Kanal 2 and revived the public debate on ghosts and their ability to cause physical injuries. For example, the series featured the story of a repairman working in the Põlma windmill. He encountered a ghost in the mill who allegedly grabbed his hand at night so hard that he was left with bruises (Elu24 2008).

Recent topical personal experience narratives mostly depict a short-term violent event in a specific time and space. However, there were also some interpretations that claimed the physical damage takes place over a longer period, for example pointing to energy vampirism as the cause of certain health problems:

> My friend had a situation when a "friend" gave him an abstract painting depicting a spiral. From the beginning, he didn't feel good about keeping it at home, but it hung on his wall for a while. In a channelling session, the realisation finally came to him that this painting was like an eye in his home, with which the friend had held him in his grip and used his energy. When this became known, he returned the painting to the owner, who was terribly angry about it. Subconsciously, he realised that the source of his power had been cut off. After that, this friend noticed that life began feeling lighter again, and his health began to improve.
> (EFITA, I1, woman in twenties, 2023)

It is worth noting that similar explanatory mechanisms are lacking in older traditions where extreme exhaustion or other physical ailments are mainly viewed as being caused by malevolent sorcery, the influence of the underground spirits or the netherworld. In the examined contemporary material, there was, however, also a personal experience narrative that associated sudden lack of energy, breathing difficulties and various pains with the influence of a dead person, namely with the fact that the experiencer felt sorry when seeing the grave of a freshly buried young man. She later heard from a healer who explained that she created an energetic bond with the deceased who began to rob her of her energy (EFITA, A2, woman in seventies, 2020).

In school lore, there were numerous descriptions of instances of deliberate collective thrill-seeking in places charged with dangerous supernatural connotations (e.g. abandoned houses, cemeteries, ruins, dark rooms). Therefore, participants in such experiments were prone to interpret their experiences supernaturally, or sometimes stopped the activity proactively, fearing that the supernatural aggression would get out of control (cf. Hiiemäe 2019, 35), as in the following account: "You put three candles before a mirror and say 'Bloody Mary' three times and then she appears and kills you, but I haven't tried it and never would" (EFITA, KP, ID534, girl, 14, 2018). Especially in children's lore, the imagination of what was read and seen in the media is so vivid that it acquires the dimension of physical sensation, not so much because of some supernatural being behaving violently, but through the manifestation of the fearful reactions of the person who assumes and imagines such violence (e.g. zombies biting, EFITA, KP, ID482, girl, 17, 2018).

## Alien Aggression

If we comparatively look at the emergence of violence in UFO lore, the narratives are different in both cultural-geographical and temporal dimensions. For example, in the context of the United States, the movement of the "UFO victims" has clearly gained more resonance. In respective personal experience narratives, Thomas E. Bullard (1989, 48) points out the characteristic abundance of fantasy and motifs "rarely found outside the preindustrial magical and religious tradition." Since the 1960s, American thematic narratives of alien abduction have contained, among other things, a considerable component of physical violence, such as painful medical procedures performed on people, which have never been depicted in a comparable proportion in Estonian material.

However, changes in narratives of alien encounters over time can also be observed within Estonian material. As mentioned, the 1990s were the height of stories about alien abductions and experiments on humans in Estonia, and the motives related to alien violence were also mediated by well-known spokespersons of paranormal topics (e.g. Aigar Säde). The media resonated, for example, with reports in newspapers about a woman claimed she received serious burns from alience who had attempted to clone her. Even in the narrative schoolchildren's material from the early 1990s, the relationship with the aliens is more physical and depicts aliens abducting children and doing medical experiments on them, drawing marks on their bodies, but also healing them (Kõiva 1995, 310). Even though as recently as 2010 newspaper headlines such as "Top scientist: aliens exist and threaten humanity!" (Forte 2010) still occur, this and later media approaches have remained rather on a theoretical level. Modern narratives even depict a positive cooperation between aliens and individuals (e.g. Suurraid 2023 describing friendly information exchange with the alien called Rohaan). Especially in the esoteric subculture, a narrative of a personal encounter with aliens can become an important part of one's identity and a turning point in the achievement of spiritual awakening (cf. Kivari 2021, 104). Twenty-first-century interviews (e.g. Volke 2017; Kivari 2021, 90) mostly describe nightly light effects in the sky, sometimes associated with specific physical sensations (e.g. temporary paralysis, electric shock) but seldom with physical contact or violence. In only a few cases marks found on the body are interpreted as being caused by aliens:

> I had a strange occurrence at home. I slept and noticed in sleep that I was developing goosebumps. I read Paternoster, get anxious. I open my eyes, can't move. Before waking up I hear a kind of cosmic voice saying: "We are coding you." I see before me a circa two-meter-tall figure in a silvery illuminated spacesuit. I couldn't move, started reading Paternoster again, after which the figure went away through the wall. In the evening, I notice a triangle burned into the skin of my left arm. (woman, 2014; published in Volke 2017a, 396)

Yet in the School-lore 2018 questionaire, aliens were viewed mainly with curiosity rather than fear. There were practically no narratives depicting direct alien violence, but several children mentioned hearing stories about aliens who could abduct and enslave

people (e.g. EFITA, KP, ID2396, boy, 18, 2018). One of the few narratives about immediate physical involuntary action was related to a village in western Estonia that has also received rich topical coverage in the media (e.g. Vahe 2016), so it is possible that there is an interaction between such media content and interpersonal storytelling:

> My relatives live in Häädemeeste and really terrible things take place there. People become transparent so that others won't see them. Additionally, my grand aunt has been taken to a UFO ship two times, and they enter people's houses at night.
> (EFITA, KP, ID223, boy, 12, 2018)

At the same time, the topic of aliens has lost its relevance for many older schoolchildren and adults, who instead view these stories through the prism of humour.

## Conclusions

Fear of violence and death is a universal fear, and experiences interpreted as violence of supernatural origin or the threat of it presuppose and trigger intense psychosomatic reactions, as well as active narrative reasoning. A multisensory experience involving perceived physical violence is frightening and harder to ignore than simply seeing a vague shadowy figure in the night, thus such experiences are more likely to become the subject of retellings in the past as well as in the present. However, compared to personal experience narratives that detail other supernaturally interpreted sensations (e.g. unexplained sound, touch, or visual images), the number of contemporary stories describing a personal experience of direct physical violence is still small – no more than a few percent. This amount is especially small compared to the proportion of which physically aggressive supernatural beings are depicted in TV series and films. In contrast, the fear that a supernatural phenomenon could *potentially* be physically harmful was described in most narratives depicting the supernatural, and the experiencers perceived a *real* threat to their health and safety – probably at least partly inspired by media-mediated supernatural violence. But all in all, such a fear response seems to be prompted by an interplay of biological, cognitive, and psychological factors, as well as by cultural narrative scripts.

Positions that various supernatural beings hold in individuals' worldviews, and the specific beings that are the subject of a story, along with the fears associated with them, change over time. However, in both older and more recent narratives, the central motive – and this can indeed be considered a universal feature independent of time – is the struggle to regain control over one's body and feelings, to ensure safety, and to make sense of the experience, often through arguments of guilt and revenge.

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# A MAN TURNED INTO A ROCK GIANT: A LOCAL LEGEND ABOUT LOVE, SEA AND METAMORPHOSIS FROM VIESTE, GARGANO

Vito Carrassi*

**Introduction**

Vieste is a little town of approximately 13,000 inhabitants on the Gargano peninsula (Apulia, Southern Italy), overlooking the Adriatic Sea. It is one of the most popular and well-equipped seaside resorts in southern Italy, and the Apulian town that received the most tourists over the last several years. Its territory is characterised both by natural attractions, such as cliffs, sea caves, islets, seashores, and forests, and anthropic features, closely related to the ancient history of this place. Vieste features prehistoric archaeological sites, and the old town centre has a tangled structure and suggestive position, complete with a thirteenth-century castle and a medieval cathedral. However, if you ask its inhabitants – and I am one of them – to choose a symbol of their identity or the object most representative of their town, the answer will almost always be Pizzomunno.

Given its peculiar look and location, it is not surprising that Pizzomunno is regarded not only as an identifying feature of Vieste but also as a prominent asset in the local economy, being one of the most popular attractions of the town. What makes this monolith even more significant and fascinating is a local legend attached to it, which, as will be shown through an analysis of the available written sources, is the result of a combination of motifs coming from some earlier folk narratives. As stressed by field research conducted in 2023, such a legendary arrangement has been preserved and kept alive in the oral tradition, giving rise to a quite homogeneous piece of place-lore by which the locals identify and enhance the uniqueness of Pizzomunno. Indeed, what has

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been observed in the last years, especially after the propitious encounter between this legend and a renowned Italian singer-songwriter, is a local community increasingly investing in Pizzomunno both as a tangible and intangible heritage in order to promote itself, as well as to diversify its tourist offering. The result of this analysis is an interesting case of the second life of folklore or heritagisation, as exemplified by some cultural events and social and economic outcomes that will be described and examined.

**A Rock Giant and its Narratives**

The legacy of Pizzomunno begins with its peculiar look and location. This large and tall limestone rock is located right at the southern entrance of the town at the end of a long waterside studded with campsites, hotels and lidos (Fig. 1). Given its height of about 25 metres, it could be mistaken as a rocky and white building of about eight floors situated at a short distance from the cliff upon which the old town centre stands. However, some have regarded it as a rocky and white giant appointed to watch those who come in Vieste; as argued by Nafiye G. Kıyak (quoted in Buğrul 2014, 33): "With their forms, some of the rocks and stones have an image like people or animals. These images of the rocks and stones are associated and made sacred with a legend […]."

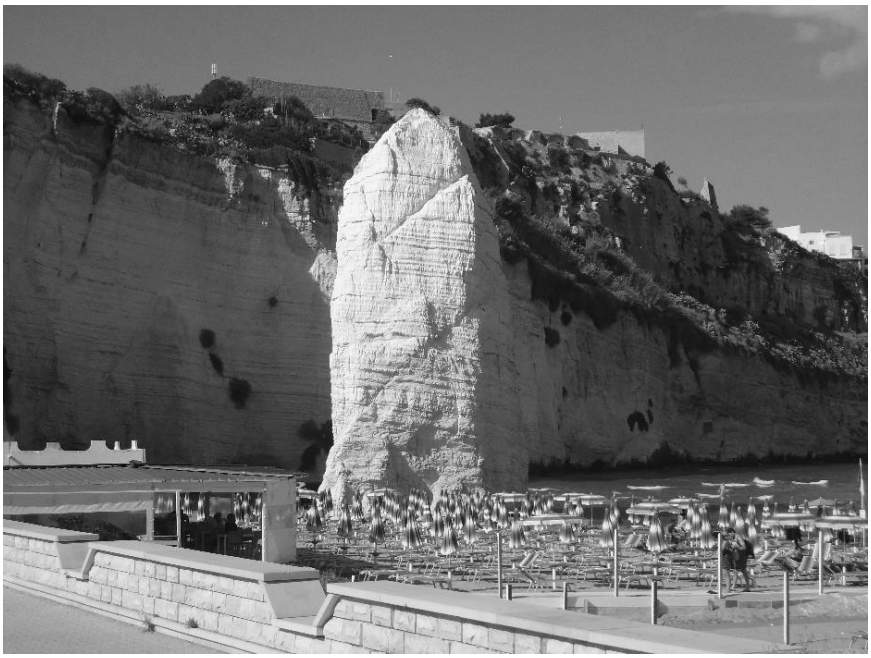

Figure 1. Pizzomunno.

As mentioned above, the significance and the exemplarity of this piece of rock – in fact, the outcome of millennia of erosion by sea and wind (Massoli-Novelli 2005, 70–71; Russi and Massoli-Novelli 2008, 21) – arises not only from its physical peculiarity, but also from a legendary corpus attached to it, which is responsible for the

anthropomorphic interpretation of its origin (see Buğrul 2014, 33). In other words, according to some of these legends, Pizzomunno, or Pizzimunno – whose meaning should be "piece of the world" or, according to an alternative etymology, "the end of the world" (from the Latin *finis mundi*, Melillo 1926) – is the result of a transformation from man to stone, or else of a process of petrifaction. This is something widespread in mythology and folklore, starting from the well-known Greek myth of Medusa, the female monster who petrified people through her gaze, and the biblical legend of Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt for having ignored a God's prohibition.

However, in the earliest known version of the legend of Pizzomunno, published by Antonio Beltramelli in his book *Il Gargano*, the stone is just the setting of a sad love story featuring the same characters we will find in later stories. The short legend collected by Beltramelli from a local fisherman tells about an amazingly beautiful but nameless girl, her nameless lover and some jealous mermaids.[1] One day, the mermaids, overcome by jealousy, kidnapped the girl and brought her to the bottom of the sea, where she was fettered (B81.13.8 Curse by mermaid; D1719.7 Magic power of mermaid; F940 Extraordinary underwater disappearance). Her lover was then condemned to stay on the Pizzomunno seashore, where he eternally suffered for having lost his beloved. Every one hundred years, however, the mermaids, touched by such great love, allow the lovers to meet again just for one day. At night, when they allow themselves to believe they will at last stay together, the ruthless mermaids pull the chains and bring back the girl to the bottom of the sea, leaving her lover crying for an additional one hundred years (Beltramelli 1907, 105–6).[2]

A similar version of this legend is referenced by Alfredo Petrucci in a poem devoted to Vieste included in his *Tre canti tre paesi* [Three poems three towns]. Here the beautiful girl has a name, Vestilia, while her lover is identified as Merelio. Their love is contrasted by the "jealous and merciless" mermaids, who entice the girl to the bottom of the sea "with gifts and flattery," so that they can "chain down her little feet."[3] The only concession they allow is again the loosening of her chains every one hundred years, "at the August's full moon," in order to enable her to stay with Merelio for some hours; when sunrise comes, the chains are pulled back and the girl is brought back into the underwater realm of the mermaids. Interestingly, a petrifaction is suggested about Vestilia after her descent to the bottom of the sea. Her lover, instead, is depicted as a shadow eternally wandering on the seashore (Petrucci 1950, 12–14).

In the legend of "Pizzo Mummo" – literally 'the piece of Mummo' – reported by Pasquale Ridolfi in the local journal *Il faro di Vieste*, the story is endowed with religious meaning, being set in a period of Christian persecution and based on the tragic conflict between a Pagan noble, Mummo, and his beautiful and Christian daughter (nameless,

[1] See Thompson (1946, 244): "These ladies, half woman, half fish, perhaps command as widespread a real belief as any other creatures of human fancy. There are not actually many specific tales about the adventures of mermaids, merely accounts of hundreds of people who say they have seen them."

2 This same story was included by the renowned folklorist Sverio La Sorsa (1877–1970) in his collection of Apulian legends (La Sorsa 1958, 278–9) with the title "La fanciulla di Vieste" ('The young girl from Vieste').

[3] All the translations from Italian to English in this article are mine.

again). More importantly, the origin of the rock of Pizzomunno is explained for the first time as the result of a transformation from man to stone, an exemplary punishment for the "cruel and wicked" Mummo (D231 Transformation: man to stone). As a fierce persecutor of Christians, he ordered his soldiers to catch a group of people gathered to listen to an aged preacher. Among them were his daughter and a young fisherman in love with her; the motif of a (sad) love between a beautiful girl and a fisherman is then maintained, while the malevolent function of mermaids is taken over by the girl's father. The fisherman, willing to defend his beloved, opposed the soldiers, but "he was pierced by one hundred spears." Shocked by such a loss, the girl prayed to God for her own death. Advancing into the sea, he desperately invoked his beloved, "as long as a storm suddenly raged, pushing the wretch against the rocks, so as to stain the sea with her blood." Incensed after the loss of his daughter, Mummo inveighed against God for not having preserved one of his faithful:

> In that moment a bolt of lightning brushed Mummo, who was petrified; the day after, the Viestans saw the two lovers dead on the seashore and a strange rock, and they realised the tragic event. From then on they called that rock 'Pizzo Mummo,' as a symbol of a justice about which we are used to doubt (Ridolfi 1954, 3).

Unlike the legend featuring the mermaids, here we find a bad action made by a "malefactor," Mummo, who is punished by a different antagonist, God, because of his blasphemous speech; on the other hand, the man, like the fisherman with the mermaids, "has harmed or offended […] the antagonist" (Johansen 1989, 187). At the same time, God punishes Mummo for having caused the death of two innocent persons. As a consequence, such a punishment serves two purposes. First, it gives the legend both an etiologic function,[4] as it explains the existence of an odd physical feature, in this case, a rock, whose "immobility and inanimate state […] will give an ominous impression, especially if it resembles a person" (Johansen 1989, 198). Secondly, the punishment gives the legend a religious and moral meaning, since it dramatically shows that bad actions have consequences (Johansen 1989, 200).

Nonetheless, the most common and currently widespread legend telling the origins of Pizzomunno is again the account of an intense and romantic love story between a beautiful girl and a young fisherman, tragically interrupted by the malevolent action of some jealous mermaids. What makes this version more striking and thorough, so to speak, is the addition of an etiologic element, which streamlines the fisherman's fate into becoming Pizzomunno. In several ways, this legend seems to combine and rework the main motifs present in the earlier versions – two youths in love, jealous mermaids, punishment, metamorphosis – so as to bring forth a comprehensive and significant picture of a local landscape characterised by a huge limestone rock, whose location

[4] As pointed out by Hasan El-Shamy (2010, 455, italics in the original): "In folklore, the term *etiology* has been applied frequently in conjunction with other folkloristic concepts to designate the explanatory function of an item, commonly in narrative form. […] Generally speaking, a traditional account of how a thing originated would be perceived as factual and taken seriously by narrator and listeners."

makes it an emblematical sign of the transition from land to water and vice versa: a rocky threshold connecting the homonymous sandy shore – and, consequently, Vieste as a coastal town – with the sea. Due to its liminality, Pizzomunno can therefore physically and metaphorically embody the changing and controversial relationships between humans and the sea, as perfectly epitomised by the presence and interaction of liminal figures such as a fisherman and the mermaids.

Scholar and disseminator of Garganic folklore Giuseppe D'Addetta was the first to publish this version of the legend in 1954, in the local journal *La Tribuna di Foggia*; it was then included in his 1960 folk narrative collection *Le leggende dello Sperone* [The legends of the spur], which referred to Gargano, the "spur" of the Italian boot. As with other legends collected in the book, the oral account of a local informant is reworked and embellished by the author so as to turn the legend of Pizzomunno into a peculiar piece of folk literature (D'Addetta 1960, 170–83; cf. Siena 2009, 271). It is entitled *Ogni cento anni* [Every one hundred years] – a motif we already know – and is presented by the informant as "a long and painful story which could be regarded as a folktale if there would not be some old fishermen guaranteeing that what is told is all true." The first character to be introduced is "the most beautiful girl in Gargano, more handsome than the sun […] whose name was Vesta," a name similar to the earlier Vestilia and a clear reference to the town's name. *Vestae* and *Vestia* have been some of the most attested toponyms since the sixteenth century (Siena 2009, 16). Vesta's lover was "Pizzimunno, a fisherman with perfect and powerful limbs." Spending all the day on the sea, he often bumped into some very beautiful mermaids (B81.9 Appearance of a mermaid) whose seductive songs were intended to lure him into the abyss, where "he would have been their master, free to have all of them or just those who he would have desired […] they would have made him immortal and eternally loved." But the beauty and the promises of the mermaids were nothing for Pizzimunno compared with his love for Vesta, with whom he would spend every night after he came back from the sea. In spite of their insistence, the mermaids could never obtain what they wanted from the fisherman. Having reached the limits of their jealousy and rancour, the mermaids deliberated "an extremely cruel verdict that would have inflicted eternal pain to the two lovers." One night, while the lovers were on their boat, a seductive chant, coming from the bottom of the sea, slowly approached them. Vesta was scared, foreseeing her fate. The mermaids appeared suddenly behind her, seizing the girl with chains and drawing her under the sea (D1719.7 Magic power of mermaid; F940 Extraordinary underwater disappearance). Shocked, Pizzimunno plunged into the sea, attempting to save Vesta, but in vain. Exhausted, he turned to "a tall and white rock" (D231 Transformation: man to stone; D661 Transformation as revenge for repulsing amorous advances). Once taken into the underwater realm of the mermaids, the poor girl was transformed into a coral stele (D237 Transformation: (wo)man to coral) and anchored to the bottom of the sea by chains. However, as predicted by the title, the mermaids allowed the two lovers to meet each other every one hundred years. When they regain their human features they can stay together for one night, as long as Vesta is swallowed again by the sea and

Pizzimunno, when swimming to reach Vesta, becomes again the homonymous sea stack, "a huge ghost made of white stone" (D620 Periodic transformation).

According to this version of the legend, Pizzomunno would be therefore the result of a love triangle featuring two human characters – the eponym young fisherman and his beloved girl with a name referring to Vieste – and some mythical creatures, the mermaids, who sprout up from the sea fascinated by the beauty of the fisherman. They want to bring him with them under the sea so as to make him a marine creature, even their ruler – though, the dishonesty of mermaids can be traced as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*. Despite his close connection to the sea and the appeal of the mermaids and their tempting proposal, the fisherman is too much attached to the beauty of his lover (Vesta) and the land that they inhabit and share (Vieste) to leave. The consequence of such a conflicting interplay is cruel revenge by the mermaids, who cannot endure being rejected for a mortal creature: they abduct Vesta, forcing her to become a fixed and unchangeable piece of the underwater world. They also punish Pizzimunno for his excessive attachment to the land by making him a monolith that is a fixed and unchangeable piece of the terrestrial landscape. However, their human nature is not completely cancelled by such a terrible punishment because they are allowed to become again the man and the woman they were, although for only one day every one hundred years. In other words, in addition to a romantic story about an intense, tragic and immortal love told to explain the origin of a landscape feature and give sense to a specific place (cf. Gunnell 2009, 308–9), this is a legend concerning a reversible metamorphosis, as if the inanimate matter of Pizzomunno were mysteriously animated by the fisherman's spirit: something that undoubtedly emphasises the anthropomorphic and supernatural meaning ascribed to our rocky giant, making at the same time the two lovers' fate slightly less painful.

**Telling the Place-Lore Today**

More contemporary voices have added to the growing legend of Pizzomunno. I conducted several interviews with residents of Vieste and assigned research to my high school students, both of which enabled me to collect exactly thirty oral versions of the legend, told by informants belonging to three different generations.

Overall, the collected accounts display a substantial adherence to the plot and the motifs featuring the story published by D'Addetta. Nonetheless, some significant variants can be noticed, which especially concern the female figure. In fact, one of these variants, related to the name of the unfortunate girl, has almost completely replaced the earlier form. She is currently known as Cristalda instead of Vesta or Vestilia, so much so that the pair Pizzomunno-Cristalda is by now something deeply rooted both in the collective imagination and in the tourism onomastics, as exemplified by the homonymous hotels and lidos. A much less common but significant variant concerns the nature of Cristalda, who identifies herself as a mermaid, more precisely as a good mermaid punished by her evil sisters, jealous of her love connection with Pizzomunno. In a couple versions, the name of the male character differs too, being Munno and not

Pizzomunno, thus bringing to mind the Mummo of Ridolfi's account. According to another variant, Cristalda is not enchained at the bottom of the sea, but she eternally cries for her lost lover, much like the eternally crying Pizzomunno narrated by Beltramelli. There is also an informant who ascribes the emersion of Cristalda every one hundred years to the empathy of the king of the sea. As for the fate of the enchained girl, it appears as though the oral tradition totally ignores her transformation into a coral stele; therefore, we can infer that she endures her punishment by keeping her human nature. While unspecified in the written version, the day of the lovers' reunion is generally specified in the oral accounts – and on the websites – as the night of August 15, of course not an ordinary date for a tourist and seaside town. Finally, a very peculiar variant omits the mermaids all together, and the two lovers come instead from rival families, in a sort of local remake of Romeo and Juliet.

Two handsome youths in love, some jealous and vindictive mermaids, the abduction to the abyss of the young woman, the petrifaction of the young man, and their reunion for one night every one hundred years are the motifs most commonly found in the legend's versions published online, both in informational websites – such as Wikipedia, local newspapers, institutional platforms or travel blogs[5] – and in those aimed at promoting Vieste and its tourist business. Actually, the story of Pizzomunno (and Cristalda) has increasingly acquired a key role in the identification, enhancement and promotion of Vieste, a process dating back at least to 1998, when the municipality decided to commemorate the legendary couple with a monument in the form of a tall and thin white stele symbolically portraying the two lovers, constructed by the Apulian artist Michele Circiello (Fig. 2). Especially in the last decade, an extended and concerted process of heritagisation[6] – or "rehabilitation of folk tradition" (Vajda 2018, 122–25) – has been carried out by the local community around this singular combination of tangible (natural) and intangible (cultural) heritage – which are so impressively connected in petrifaction legends (Buğrul 2014, 33) – so as to make a landscape feature a sort of town's hallmark or calling card. As argued by Leticia C. Aracil (2023, 160): "In the context of tourism, storytelling is the main means by which to endow a particular landscape with meaning and historical significance." That is to say, what makes Pizzomunno special and attractive is not only its majestic materiality, but also its origin story and the connected folk beliefs that complete this picture, generating "an enchanted perception" (Aracil 2023, 161) of that same materiality. Ultimately, such a "heritage narrative" can be employed as an effective means to provide "insiders and outsiders with new lenses through which reading the landscape and its meaning" (Pettenati 2023, 2).

[5] However, I have also found two "cultural" blogs, www.amaraterramia.it and https://storievie stane.blogspot.com/, where the legend is presented in its different versions.

[6] For an extensive and accurate discussion of this concept I refer to Davallon 2010.

Figure 2. Top: Monument (Pizzomunno side).
Bottom: Monument (Cristalda side).

Accordingly, if the exploitation of a landscape gives rise to a form of "cultural and heritage tourism," what results from a landscape fashioned by its folklore is a specific form of "folklore tourism" (Everett and Parakoottathil 2018, 30–32; for a critical reflection on folklore, landscape and tourism see Hrobat Virloget 2023, 204-8).

**From Folklore to Tourism**

To use a well-known theoretical framework by Lauri Honko, this local legend has thus moved from a first, informal and inside-oriented life to a second, more formalised and outside-oriented life, based chiefly on the emancipation of the folklore community, the use of folklore in cultural policy, its commercialisation and the fulfilment of the community's needs (Honko 2013, 39–53). As clarified by Tuomas Hovi (2014, 10), such a second life starts "when the context of the use of the folklore changes, usually for commercial, political and recreational reasons," but this does not imply that the legend has lost its value or authenticity because it conforms to a changed context (cf. Carrassi 2017, 3–4, 7–8). This means, referring to the similar concept of "folklorism," to regard folklore "not as a conservative element of spiritual culture which survives during the progressive development of society, but rather, as a dynamic structure in which relics coexist with innovations" (Šmidchens 1999, 52). In other words, one piece of a local identity, closely related to a specific "placemaking" (Basso 1996, 5–7), or else to a folk tradition concerning the supernatural origin of a natural site, has gradually turned into an identifying item embedded in the global arena of the worldwide communication and tourism. This is where folklore needs to be interpreted less as cultural heritage "being passed down through generations" than as a set of events and experiences devised to "entertain and attract visitors" (Everett and Parakoottathil 2018, 30) or even to create "a sense of intimacy with the place that does not occur otherwise" (Aracil 2023, 159).

What has definitely boosted such a process, and a real turning point in the history of our legend, is found in a pop song that a renowned Italian artist, Max Gazzè, presented at one of the most important music festivals, the "Festival della canzone italiana," taking place every year in Sanremo. In 2018, on this prestigious and international stage – and before an audience of millions of televiewers from Italy and many other countries in the world – Gazzè played for the first time his song entitled "La leggenda di Cristalda e Pizzomunno," which dealt with a subject directly inspired by the homonymous legend. Indeed, the lyrics have a remarkable faithfulness to the folklore source. Some of the most significant links include mermaids as an "enthralling choir bursting into your mind" and Cristalda who warns Pizzomunno about "that mocking wave sinking your helpless love," claiming as well that "I will remain always faithful to you, even if I should wait for one hundred years." The mermaids are attracted by "the tense muscles of the handsome fisherman," whose "umpteenth refusal was punished one day" when the mermaids "came up from the sea […] someone saw them bringing Cristalda in chains at the bottom of the sea." This "paralysed him [Pizzomunno] forever, so that since then people contemplate him as a white limestone giant." Finally, "it is said that, during an August's dawn, the beautiful Cristalda climbs back from the wave to live again a wonderful story" (Gazzè 2018a).

As expressly stated by the singer-songwriter, the song was based on a "very beautiful legend, discovered thanks to my brother, author of the lyrics […] an infinite love story going beyond time and death" (Gazzè 2018b). The successful impact of this song on the legend and its local context mostly lies in its interpretation as an enchanting and

touching love story whose protagonists are regarded as a personification of the purest, deepest and immortal love, unfolding itself every hundred years. As a consequence, the monolith Pizzomunno, besides its value as a fascinating feature of the landscape, and the related function as an emblematical rocky threshold marking the transition and the link between sea and land, has been charged with an emotional, romantic, and magic meaning which increases its appeal as a tourist destination, and, at the same time, emphasises the global reputation of Vieste as the town of Pizzomunno and its legend. In other words, relying upon a favourable circumstance such as a music transposition of a local legend, Vieste has been able to reinvent itself as a sort of little capital of love and lovers, a miniature of the love city par excellence, Verona (the setting of Romeo and Juliet), as perfectly shown by a variety of significant initiatives.

Max Gazzè was honoured with the honorary citizenship of Vieste on July 31, 2018. It had been justified by the town's mayor "for the great present […] he wanted to give Vieste," having brought on the prestigious stage of Sanremo "a relevant piece of our folklore;" thanks to him and its song, "Vieste […] will be even more renowned, and many people will like to know the legend of Cristalda and Pizzomunno and to visit the place where the majestic monolith rises up" (Giuliano 2018). However, the most significant and iconic moment on that day was the concert performed by Gazzè next to Pizzomunno, something that created a tangible connection between the song and the place inspiring it, in the broader context of a local community that had gathered there to celebrate itself and reflect on its identity (cf. Hafstein 2018, 128–29).

Inspired by the song, an initiative painted the lyrics and huge red hearts on a long stairway linking the main street with the upper old town (Fig. 3), further cementing Vieste as the town of love. Renamed "Scala dell'Amore" [Love Stairway], this visual testament to both the song and the legend soon became a tourist attraction and favourite location for photographs and selfies. The stairway developed its own legend and meaning: if you walk along it with your beloved, your bond will be eternal.[7]

In 2019, the first edition of the festival "Vieste in Love" was organised, certainly the most structured and engaging initiative aimed at celebrating and consecrating the late vocation of Vieste for love and lovers (cf. the concept of "festivalisation" in Hafstein 2018, 137–38). Scheduled for the first week of every September, it features a multitude of live shows and performances enlivening the town streets and squares for seven days. As expressly stated in the 2019 press release: "Vieste in Love wants to transform the town of Cristalda and Pizzomunno into the town of everlasting love. Love is meant as love for nature and territory, for animals and children, for life and sea. And romantic love, of course." A veritable festival of love quickly became one of the most renowned and profitable events taking place in Vieste in terms of merchandising and induced consumption.

In this light, it is remarkable how the names and the effigies of Cristalda and Pizzomunno have been commercially exploited, as significantly proved by some products of the local food industry. "Cristalda and Pizzomunno" is, for instance, both

[7] Likewise, according to a local belief, if you express a wish when turning around Pizzomunno your wish will come true.

the name of an olive oil and of a rosolio – a traditional liqueur consisting of water, alcohol, sugar and attar of roses – nicknamed "rosolio dell'amore" [love rosolio], while Cristalda alone is the name unsurprisingly given to a local oyster…

Figure 3. Scala dell'Amore.

On the other hand, this legend has also lent itself to other forms of mediatisation besides the music adaptation made by Max Gazzè. In the wake of his song, indeed, the story of Cristalda and Pizzomunno has been transposed both into a theatrical performance, a cartoon which turns the legend into a (quite questionable) Disneyland fairy tale, and a musical made by an Apulian artist academy and played by young actors, singers and dancers. Finally, "Cristalda and Pizzomunno" has been adopted as the name of an international classical music festival also inaugurated in 2019.

Despite the obvious danger of trivialising, banalising or misinterpreting a piece of local folklore, all these events and initiatives must also be recognised as opportunities to keep alive or revitalise an oral tradition that is always at risk of disappearing; additionally, they make the local community more aware and proud of their narrative heritage, as well as of its value as a social and economic resource, regardless of any exploitation of the legend (cf. Hrobat Virloget 2023, 207–8).

## Conclusion

To conclude, I think that we can understand the subject here considered as a significant and intriguing example of how a local legend – and folklore in general – is able to act as

a key factor in triggering a variety of cultural, social and economic processes that contribute to the revitalisation and refashioning of a local community. As shown by this specific case, it is the interplay between inner and outer actors, events and strategies that make a landscape unique, such as the rock of Pizzomunno, something more complex and open to new interpretations and uses. If it is true that "places […] appear differently to local people and to outsiders," it is as much true that "the related narrative traditions are transformed when they circulate in various media and across boundaries" (Valk and Sävborg 2018, 9). The legend of Pizzomunno and Cristalda was shaped and handed down in Vieste by its inhabitants as an identifying and entertaining story about the ambivalence of love, the sea as a dangerous place, and a huge rock as a petrified man; once discovered and enhanced by a renowned outsider, it has basically retained these intitial meanings but has inevitably changed its scope and resonance. This has granted the locals a cultural resource to be spent and exploited in the globalised context of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, it is through its folkloric function of making alive an inanimate piece of rock that our legend "provides a peculiar knowledge of a place that arouses in the audience a feeling of intimacy with it," thus inviting both the local and the tourist to live a deeper experience of the place itself (Aracil 2023, 166). More generally, as argued by Katja Hrobat Virloget (2023, 208), when folklore, landscape and tourism intersect, "a new foundation for collective identity" can be established, as well as a "wider self-reflection and re-evaluation of place-folklore narratives." All in all, as a folk narrative being part of a dynamic and changing local and global context, the legend of Pizzomunno, through the variety of interpretations and uses, continues to fulfil its own purpose: to tell a story about a place in which a local community identifies itself and reflects its changes.

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# THE LEGEND ABOUT THE CORMORANTS OF UTRØST – AN EVERLASTING STORY?

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In this text, I discuss the Norwegian legend called "The Cormorants of Utvær. A fairy tale from Nordland." This legend is included in Asbjørnsen and Moe's (1842–1844) collection of fairy tales and legends and was first edited by Peter Chr. Asbjørnsen as "Skarvene fra Utrøst. Et Eventyrsagn fra Nordlendene" in *Norsk Folkekalender* (Asbjørnsen 1848). In the digital version of Norsk Folkeminnearkiv [Norwegian folklore archive] we find eleven versions of the narrative about Utrøst.

What caught my curiosity is how this narrative about the island of Utrøst and the cormorants is still alive and featured in a variety of contexts. A good story is never told for the first time; it changes and varies with time and surroundings. At the same time, elements on different levels recognised as old and well-known may give a story a quality of continuity.

References to the magical island of Utrøst appear in several contexts. I question in what ways a traditional legend from former days is part of dialogues with contemporary categories and contexts such as politics, artistic performances or current spirituality. How and in what relations is a narrative about supernatural islands communicated today and how does it speak to modern people?

Therefore, I will emphasise the ways and varying contexts in which the story is told, re-told, and alluded to in contemporary settings and contexts. In one of the following examples cited, it is referred to as 'our heritage,' indicating that the story is old and thus of great value, a story that modern people should both be aware of and take care of.

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## Utrøst and *Huldreland*

Asbjørnsen's version begins as follows:

> On their way home, the fishermen of the Northland often find bits of straw on the rudders of their boats, or barley grains in the stomachs of the fish they have caught. Then they say that they have gone through Utrøst or one of the other enchanted lands described in the legends of the Northlands. They are revealed only to the devout, or people with second sight in peril at sea, and they appear in places where there is no real land. The inhabitants of these magic lands till the soil, raise sheep and go fishing like other people, but there the sun shines on greener meadows and richer fields than anywhere else in the Northland: Happy the man who lands on one of these sunny little islands, or even gets a glimpse of one. 'He's safe,' the people up there will say. (The Cormorants of Utrøst 2001)

This description indicates that the island of Utrøst belongs to a group of ideas known as *Huldreland* or *Alveland* ('Elf's land') (Edvardsen 2015). Most of the time and to most people, Utrøst is invisible but may be revealed in certain situations and to certain persons; seafarers or fishermen in distress at sea offering a safe and peaceful harbour. After entering the harbour at Utrøst it is told that the seamen did not want to go ashore. They threw a rope on land, hoping someone there would tie them up, and leave as soon as the weather cleared. Like other *huldreland*, Utrøst was imagined to be a fertile place, greener and with rich fisheries, similar to the narratives about the prosperous *hulder* farms that in certain situations were revealed to some people (see e.g. Solheim 1952, ch. VII). These narratives demonstrate ideas about a different folk, living near and among humans but in a parallel dimension, usually hidden from humans. They can live underground, in the mountains or in the dangerous outlying fields, or, as on Utrøst, under the sea. Interactions between *hulder* and humans could have both positive and negative outcomes for the humans (Selberg 2011, 31). The same holds true for Utrøst.

## The Legend of *The Cormorants about Utrøst*

Of the eleven texts about Utrøst in NFS, Asbjørnsen's version (1953) is the most elaborated and tells a story about the pious fisherman Isak and his meeting with the people – and cormorants – on Utrøst. Other versions in NFS are rather short descriptions of Utrøst, emphasising its magical and dangerous qualities. One motif found throughout the legends is the idea that Utrøst is a bountiful land with fertile acres of rye, houses and fishing boats.

In Asbjørnsen's variant of the tale, the protagonist is a poor fisherman called Isak, who strives to provide for his family. He lives on the island of Værøy in Lofoten, north of Røst. He is described as a man with the virtues a decent man of the people should have; a poor, yet loyal working man who is satisfied despite his poverty (Byberg 1970, 160).

The story tells of how one day, Isak was out fishing when a terrible storm came over him, leaving him disoriented. He sailed on without any land in sight. The tempest was

so harsh that he could see neither land nor his course. Suddenly, he heard a terrifying cry, and, thinking his last hour had come, he believed it was the spirit of the waters singing the final song for him. Then he spotted something black and became aware of three cormorants sitting on a piece of wood. They were only visible for a moment, and, having passed them in the blink of an eye, things went on as before. However, unexpectedly, Isak found himself in safe and peaceful waters and saw green land ahead. 'Thank God, this must be Utrøst,' he thought, 'I am saved.' A man dressed in blue came to meet him and wished him welcome to Utrøst. He asked if Isak had seen his three sons, but Isak answered that he had only seen three cormorants. It is only later that we learn that the three cormorants had, in fact, been Utrøst-man's sons in disguise. Furthermore, it is stressed that they did not take a liking to either Christians or pious people.

Isak stayed at Utrøst and had a pleasant sojourn. He was invited to go fishing with the three sons, who proved to be great sailors and fishermen. After a while, Isak got homesick and decided to leave. He received gifts and was invited back to Utrøst. When Isak asked how to find Utrøst again, he was told to follow the cormorant when it flew out to sea, and that he would be on the right course.

After this visit, Isak had good fortune both in fisheries and life, subsequently becoming rich and living a good life. He also got a new boat with fishing equipment that gave him great luck, and, knowing where it had come from, he was always grateful for it.

**Utrøst and Lofoten**

Utrøst is *Huldreland*, part of another dimension but at the same time, the island has a location in the geography of Lofoten, an archipelago in the northern part of Norway. It is said to be situated several miles offshore Røst, the uttermost island in the Lofoten archipelago. The community of Røst acknowledges their neighbouring island, commemorating the tale of Utrøst in the form of three black cormorants which grace their municipal coat of arms. The local regulation mentions the "Skarvene fra Utrøst" story as a reason for this choice of motif. According to the legend it is further stated in the local regulation that three brothers lived on Utrøst and that they could transform themselves into cormorants (Arntzen, n.d.).

Today, the Lofoten are an area that is conceived of, and described as, exceptional, both in atmosphere, natural beauty and drama. A touristic newspaper segment from *Lofoten* (n.d.) states the following:

> Lofoten … is an archipelago and a traditional district in the county of Nordland, Norway. Lofoten has distinctive scenery with dramatic mountains and peaks, open sea and sheltered bays, beaches and untouched lands.
>
> Lofoten is a place of contrasts. It's a natural wonder with thriving local communities. It's where mountains meet the sea, and where local businesses meet recreation. Lofoten's distinctive magic lies in its ability to bring together everyday local life with a global interest in its natural beauty.

**The Cormorants**

The three cormorants appearing in the story about Isak do not play a great role in the other ten variants of the legend of Utrøst found in NFS. However, they take up considerable space in contemporary versions. In Asbjørnsen's version, the three cormorants add mystique and tension; we are told that they are transformations of three humans, who do not like Christians such as the main character of the story, Isak. In the newspaper article cited above (Arntzen, n.d.), however, the journalist refers to the birds as the ones that saved Isak.

It is common to see a cormorant flying fast and low over water, and, perhaps most characteristically, standing on a rock by the shore, drying its wings after diving for fish. They spread their wings to dry, facing into the wind to get maximum effect (Murdoch 2020).

This bird is also described as one of the most iconic, surrounded by myths and legends. In the Greek story of Ulysses, a cormorant saves the hero after a great storm by giving him a 'life jacket' (Murdoch 2020). In some places in Norway, cormorants flying together may signify a message from the dead, while in other places, the bird is seen as a good luck charm for the fishermen, thus placing it among their omens (Edvardsen 2015, 29–34). The cormorants' behaviour could warn about good or bad weather and lucky fisheries. If the bird was drying its wings, it could be a sign of both good and bad weather, depending on the place along the coast. If the cormorant flew along with the boat, it foreboded good luck, and bad luck if it flew in the opposite direction (Edvardsen 2015, 33). Interestingly, Isak is told to follow the cormorants if he wants to return to Utrøst. Here, the birds become messengers between this world and the otherworldly island.

The sight of cormorants may actualise – and in a way materialise – the legend. Such an instance of 'lived legend' in Norway might be seen in the manufacture of cormorant figurines from metal. The website *Visit Norway* informs us about a blacksmith living in the small fishing village of Sund on Flakstadøya Island, who makes wrought-iron cormorants all year around: "The cormorant is a mythical bird in Northern Norwegian folk legend," the story goes on, "and the Blacksmith of Sund in Lofoten makes beautiful, simple cormorants in wrought iron. You can find Lofoten's most original souvenirs beside a clever and fascinating local museum" (The blacksmith of Sund/Sund Fisherymuseum, n.d.). Iron cormorants have been made here for more than fifty years, and visitors can stand in the warm glow of the forge and watch the smith as he shapes the cormorants' long necks. The legend of Utrøst is thus retold through the blacksmith's forging of cormorants. As Arild notes:

> The black cormorant's habitat is the outermost shoreline along the edge of the open ocean, where it stands drying its wings before its next dive. It's no wonder that fishermen have many beliefs about them. The legend of Utrøst, the land of the hidden huldre-folk, a myth of a sunken land like Atlantis, tells of a happy country under the sea where cod livers, sour-cream porridge and bread rings are plentiful. Legend has it that some of the birds we see on the coast come from this undersea world and have taken the form of cormorants (Arild 2023).

## The Legend in Literature and Music

In March 2014, the local newspaper of the Lofoten, *Lofotposten*, published an article under the headline *The Cormorants' New Adornment* (Benjaminsen 2014), stating that the legend about the *Cormorants of Utrøst* is to be retold in various novel ways; in a book, on a CD, in paintings and even in a concert, all based on the work of three local artists. "We should all learn about the cormorants of Utrøst," Linda Lillevik, one of the three interviewees, claims and goes on, "because this legend is an important part of our heritage," referring to her work with a book where the "Old Fisherman's Legend" will be retold in her own words. Further, she states: "Imagine! Through hundreds of years, this legend has wandered from mouth to mouth, but when we arrive in 2014, most of us do not know the story." The journalist asks: "Isn't it so that the story tells of a pious fisherman who was saved by cormorants on a mystical island?" His question contains a (compact) condensed variant of the legend about Utrøst; about the pious fisherman Isak, his visit to the mystical island Utrøst, and his experiences with the three cormorants. The book mentioned in the article is called "Fly med!" [Fly with us] and in the presentation we are told that it is built on the legend about the *Cormorants of Utrøst*. The writer, Linda Lillevik, renders the story in a modern form. She has also written songs inspired by the legend and a well-known musician, Ola Bremnes, has composed the music. Bremnes says: "Fly med! is built on a classical North Norwegian legend about a poor fisherman about to be wrecked outside Værøy in Lofoten. He is saved by three strange roguish birds. They show him the way through the storm to safety on the *hulder*'s island *Utrøst* – a paradise under the earth (or sea!) where everybody is dressed in blue."

Ola Bremnes' musical version is also transformed into a scenic performance at *De nordnorske festspillene*. Regarding the story of Isak, the director Anders Alterskjær says:

> The legend about the cormorants of Utrøst helping the fisherman Isak out of his predicament and guided him to Utrøst – a kind of North Norwegian Paradise – is full of mystique and is superbly fitted for dramatisation ("FLY MED! Skarvene fra Utrøst" n.d.; "Bremnes slipper ny single" 2018).

## From Artistic Performance to Politics

In May 2010, the national newspaper *Aftenposten*'s magazine *Innsikt* [Insight] published an article with the title *Lofoten – the Promised Land* (Selboskar 2010). The ingress of the article starts: "Lofoten is blessed, or cursed with rich natural resources. In addition to the fisheries, tourism in this spectacular coastal landscape has become a gold mine. Now the oil industry also noses around in the area. But the oil can prove to be a 'Fata Morgana' – a mirage." (Note: This article is almost 15 years old, the question of oil drilling in Lofoten is still a controversial political question).

The author is opposed to oil drilling in this area, and this leads him to refer to the legend about Isak and the cormorants. In the article, he retells the legend like this:

> Once upon a time long, long ago, the poor fisherman Isak from Værøy was surprised by heavy weather in Lofothavet ('The Lofoten sea'). He was carried far out to sea before he was rescued, by three cormorants who guided Isak safely to shore to a fishing village near the open sea far beyond where anyone had seen land before– anyway in good weather. The farmer on this fertile island took great care of the visitor and served him the best of food from a well-filled pantry. When after some time the storm calmed, Isak could return home in a new well-equipped boat that the farmer gave him.

Here, we recognise fragments of Asbjørnsen's version of the "Cormorants of Utvær," and, again, the cormorants are presented as rescuers, and Isak is blessed with great wealth.

The article is written by geologist Odd Harald Hansen Selboskar and is a critical contribution to the plans for oil searching and drilling in Lofoten. He claims that *The Cormorants of Utrøst* is the kind of narrative that arises in coastal areas where people dream of coming upon great resources in the sea. To Isak, it was a dream of rich fisheries that was fulfilled and, in addition, Isak's drying racks never became empty. Selboskar compares this scenario to the dream of finding oil offshore of Lofoten, and with that, an idea about endless resources and endless wealth.

If Isak from Værøy was taken by the wind as far as 100 km, Hansen Selboskar states, he would find himself close to a mountain ridge situated 100–200 meters under the sea. The Utrøst ridge, which is the Lofoten ridge's lesser-known twin brother, is among the most promising sites to find oil today. So, it is a promised land in the same way as Utrøst in the legend. To Isak, the meeting with the farmer on Utrøst was the beginning of a new life with rich fisheries and endless wealth. Similarly, the writer states, Norwegians of today believe that oil resources do not have an end. But as opposed to the fisheries, the oil is a limited good. His conclusion is that it is better to opt for fish and nature. The oil resources can be seen both as a treasure box or a *Pandora's box.* On one side, the oil can bring enormous wealth to people, and on the other, it can destroy both the rich fisheries and the spectacular nature which draws so many tourists. He sees the legend about Isak and the cormorants as a dream of eternal wealth, a dream he will warn against.

**From Oil to Health Politics**

The well-known Norwegian professor in medicine, Per Fugelli, was, for some years, the doctor on Værøy and Røst – the real neighbouring islands to Utrøst. About his experiences on these islands, he wrote the book *Doctor on Værøy and Røst,* which he refers to as a "medical folk life portrayal" (Fugelli 2006). He, too, retells the legend about "an island that sunk into the ocean long ago," and he claims that its name is Utrøst or Elfs' land, and continues: "If you want to find this island you shall follow the cormorant." His intention in writing this book is to teach people how to live a healthy life by living as people do on Værøy and Røst. He states that he loves these islands so much that it reminds him of the fantasy land Utrøst. Fugelli expresses that the islands in Lofoten represent the social medical Elfs' land. To Fugelli "the happy island" represents "a goal for a health policy based on the everyday life among the people of Værøy and Røst."

**From Politics to Spiritualism**

Popular narratives are, as demonstrated, steadily actualised in new contexts. Three websites ("Sagn og myter," n.d.; Lund 2012; "Sagnet om Utrøst og andremerkverdiheter," n.d.) all bring examples of how the legend of Utrøst is retold and connected to ideas related to modern spirituality. We are told that this old legend mentions an island sinking into the sea long ago. On these websites, the island is named Utrøst or the Elfs' land. It is said that this is a story that old people firmly believed, and it says that only the chosen ones got to see this divine land. The cormorants also have a place in these re-tellings when it is said that if you want to find Utrøst you must follow the cormorants when they fly out from Røst and westwards over the North Sea. The cormorants are said to be the guides to Utrøst and with that also relations between humans and a magical world.

It is told in various ways that Utrøst is related to higher civilisations in the past. It is said that in earlier times, there was an island west in the sea next to Røst, bearing the name Utrøst. There, the sun shone on greener meadows and the acres were richer than anything in any place in Hålogaland. In this earthly Paradise lived an inspired people (folk) of farmers and fishermen, they were blonde with a high brow and blue eyes. It has been told that they were free from any sickness or old age, they were peace-loving and had high morale […] Several thousand years ago this island sank into the sea, but it is told that the island, through the centuries has raised from the sea to give shelter from the storm for honest fishermen in distress, right up until our own times. People in Lofoten have, at times, had a strong belief that Utrøst exists. Legends about Utrøst have been told from generation to generation but the stories keep their original philosophy and mystique. This fairies' land, as it was referred to should have been a sort of earthly Paradise. The farmer who governed on Utrøst had three sons. They could change into cormorants and be sent out to save pious humans in distress at sea by letting Utrøst be revealed and save them from shipwreck. The legend about Utrøst is identified in this narrative, but many motifs and characters are given a different and new or up-to-date meaning and function, especially the cormorants. Further, it is speculated about what kind of people lived on Utrøst, maybe they came from India – a people with a "high-rank mystery religion." In the narrative it is imagined that they perhaps sought to Trenyken, the neighbouring island to Røst presented as a "strange power center." It is said that the people of Utrøst had a strong likeness to the Hyperboreans who lived in Hyperborea, and it is claimed that this land had a strong likeness with the old Hålogaland.

Besides the Utrøst legend, we can identify modern spirituality in this version. The references to old age and old legends provide the ideas and beliefs in modern spirituality with both legitimation and context. The legend about Utrøst constitutes speculations of migrations of a more elevated people who have settled in the area. These websites are contributions to the spiritual awakening which happens 'at this moment' in many parts of the world, we are told. There are also speculations about who may have inhabited this island, imagining a tall people with blond hair and blue eyes whose ancestors

stemmed from Northwest India, together with a people that came from *Pleiadene*. An extraterrestrial people who were very close to the humans both in looks and manners.

As in older stories, Utrøst is here described as a paradisiac island, one that is also interpreted within a spiritual or neo-religious context, where Lofoten is conceived as a centre of energy with mythical and mystical dimensions. Within New Age contexts, there are numerous narratives about energy centres and mythical lands with ancient – and superior – wisdom that modern men can make use of (Hanegraaf 1998; Selberg 2011). Through medialisation and communication of local ideas and narratives, such stories are updated by constantly adjusting to new groups. While the localisation and profile can be changed, the content and structure of these narratives may still be recognisable (Bowman 2000, 11). Such actualisations demonstrate that what is considered *new* in what is referred to as new religiosity, to a certain extent, may be illusory. Here, Utrøst becomes part of a global narrative as a representative of a spiritual golden age in the past.

## Conclusion

Terry Gunnell writes in the article "The Coming of the Christmas Visitors. Folk Legends Concerning the Attacks on Icelandic Farmhouses Made by Spirits at Christmas:" "To my mind, one of the most interesting aspects in the field of folk legends is the way in which migratory legends adapt to the surroundings" (Gunnell 2004, 51).

I agree with Gunnell in this; and here I have tried to demonstrate how a localised legend adapts to and is used and (re-)told within new ideas, beliefs and viewpoints. Through a sort of traditionalisation, the use of the legend about Utrøst shapes continuity, thus adding value to new ideas and viewpoints.

The legendary Utrøst is appealing in many contemporary contexts. It appears in art, the tourist industry, in modern spirituality, and as an example used in political relations – as an expression of *hybris* when it comes to the utilisation of natural resources, or as a metaphor for good health politics. The narrative about a different and mythical dimension which is present amongst us can be discovered and experienced in certain situations and is much alive in computer games, movies and TV series. It is a narrative that is steadily being updated and *Utrøst* is one example. The cormorants show the way – and constitute the link between the humans and the mystic island out in the ocean, and about then and now.

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# SUSTAINABILITY STORIES: ON NARRATIVES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Owe Ronström*

*Because something is happening here, but ya' don't know what it is*
*Do you, Mister Jones?*
(Bob Dylan 1965. "Ballad of a thin man.")

**Introduction**

The theme of this article is sustainability and narratives. The opening reflections on the concept of sustainability lead to a discussion of the potential role of narrative and metaphor in the transition to sustainability. The common observation of a discrepancy between what we know we should do to become sustainable and what we actually do is the starting point for the closing part. The conclusion advocates for the study of sustainability and narratives, and more specifically of sustainability stories, as a particularly suitable subject for ethnologists and folklorists.

The common thread throughout is the simple insight that words and narratives matter, and that it is important to pay attention to how words are used, especially when it comes to extensive, well-used, and politically potent words like sustainability. As the American science journalist Susan Ackerman (1993, 18) puts it: "Words are small forms in the wonderful chaos of the world. But they are forms; they specify the world, capture ideas, sharpen thought processes, and paint watercolors of perception." In short: words are not just signs. They do not merely stand for or represent something. They are not indifferent or interchangeable. Words are magical. They take power over the mind, show ways of thinking, and provide moulds for conclusions to be shaped. Words express the world and transform it simultaneously.

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Words for sustainability have, in a short time, ended up in the top lists of particularly well-used words worldwide. Students in the multidisciplinary international master's program Sustainable Visits at Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, were tasked with reflecting on the meaning of words for sustainability in their respective languages, including Swedish, Finnish, German, Hungarian, Spanish, Italian, Urdu, and Mandarin. The responses concretely demonstrated what we already knew in theory: the words do not mean exactly the same thing, they have different meanings, connotations, scopes, and usages. Swedish *hållbarhet*, Norwegian *bærekraft*, Danish *bæredygtighed*, and Icelandic *sjálfbærni* are not entirely equivalent, despite the languages being closely related and mutually understandable. Finnish *kestävyys* is not fully equivalent to German *Nachhaltigkeit*, French *durabilité*, Spanish *sostenibilidad* or Chinese 可持續性 (Kě chíxù xìng).

To what extent are words for sustainability in different languages at all translatable and interchangeable? However, as in a large number of articles and books on sustainability I have read over the years, I will in this article nevertheless use the English term sustainability as an all-inclusive top-domain label for a vast field, incorporating a range of related terms and concepts: climate change, environment protection, carbon neutrality, fossil-free, transition, resilience, and more.

What follows is a meditation, a think piece in a rather theoretical mode. The bottom line is a humble reminder that the basic insight that words and narratives matter is also valid for sustainability and sustainable development. Inspired by the style of German twentieth-century scholars like Simmel and Elias, I have adopted a rather condensed language and let arguments and ideas develop through numbered paragraphs. The text originates from a planned but not realised research project at Uppsala University, Campus Gotland, the workshop "Narrating Sustainability – Sustainable Narratives," held in March 2021, and the panel "Sustainability Stories" at RE:22 Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference in Reykjavík in 2022.

I write both as an engaged private individual and as a recently retired professor in ethnology at Uppsala University, Campus Gotland. The discussion is grounded in my own everyday experiences, in extensive reading over the past decade of research reports and books on narratives, and on sustainability and sustainable development, and, not least, in inspiring discussions with my colleagues at Campus Gotland, Carina Johansson, Camilla Asplund Ingemark, and Anders Häggström. I thank them and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and insights.

**Sustainability – A Productive and Different Concept**

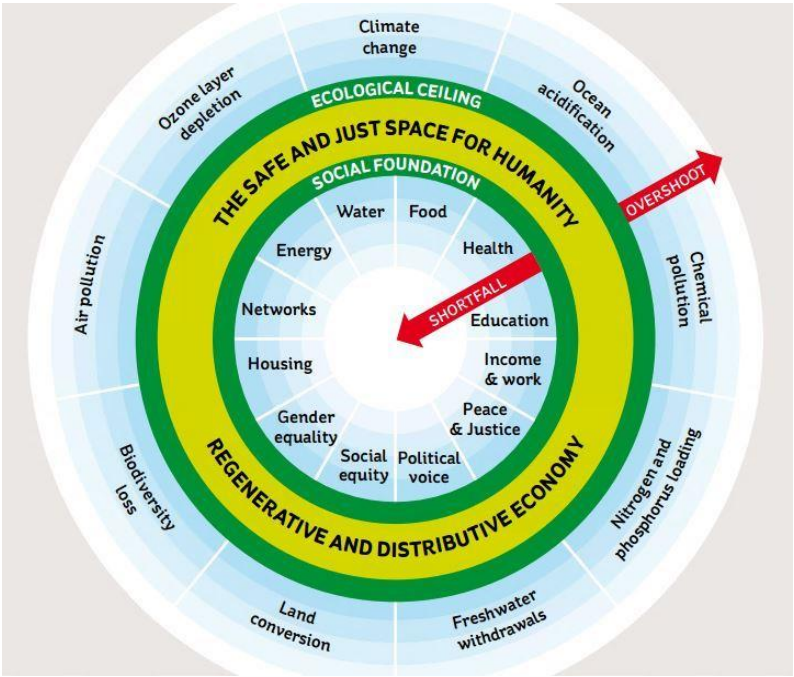
1. Sustainability is now everywhere. During the last decades, sustainability has become firmly established as one of today's most productive and important concepts—a catalyst, hub, and engine for utopias as well as dystopias, in academia and in society at large. It is a powerful concept, difficult and ambiguous, with an unusual agency and a pronounced moral, ethical, and political charge (Caradonna 2014; Corner and Clarke 2016; Bakari 2017), based on insights about the biosphere as a fixed and non-negotiable

external boundary for life on Earth (Rockström et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015). Although it has a long history, especially in the natural sciences, it is often understood as new. Judging from the way it has penetrated public discourse, education, economy, and politics during the last decade, and from the extensive 'sustainababble' this has led to, it seems likely that sustainability is not merely another trend, whim, or fashion; it has come to stay with us for a long time.

2. Sustainability is, in several ways, a different concept. Many of humanity's most fundamental concepts build on a culture-nature divide, the idea of a decisive difference between humans and other species. Ultimately encompassing the totality of life on planet Earth, sustainability entails the potential to reformulate this long-standing divide. While it is obvious that much of the sustainability discourse has continued to build on human supremacy, there are also a growing number of reformulations, such as the 'more-than-human' positions that have already established 'environmental personhood' as a legal concept to grant rivers, forests, animals, and cultural heritage artefacts around the world status and rights on par with humans (Rochford 2024; *Universal Declaration of the Rights of Rivers*).

3. A number of notions for aspects of the human world, such as humanity, civilisation, culture, and society, tend to evoke images of the world laid out horizontally, and approach these notions as 'underlying,' 'beneath,' 'behind,' or 'overarching' (Hannerz 1983). What makes sustainability different is that it entails a universalising and totalising potential to embrace and encompass the entire planet. The concept expands the image vertically to include the deep waters and the atmosphere, creating what could be called a 'biosphere-ification' of the world. In such cases, an outside position is not readily available. Since there is no commonly established agreement about what sustainability means, there will always be battles over meanings and interpretations. But even if there are different opinions, clamorous climate change deniers, and naysayers, it is hard to imagine positions that will seriously opt for 'non-sustainability' or 'anti-sustainability.'

In a widespread model called 'the donut,' Kate Raworth (2018) has visualised this biospheric space by combining the ecological outer boundaries for life on Earth with social and cultural boundaries. The model gains its rhetorical power by showing in just one image how life on Earth is conditioned by complex and dynamic interactions over and between a multitude of insurmountable external boundaries.




4. That sustainability is a productive concept is easily observable. While strong sustainability produces the earth as one, weaker versions tap into just about any existing part of society. In the stronger, absolute versions it is established as inherently compulsory, which charges it with the potential to radically reinterpret and change all kinds of previous positions, presuppositions and agreements (e.g. Magdoff and Foster 2011; Klein 2014; Andreotti et al. 2018; Hedenius, Persson and Sprei 2018). In weaker, relative versions, it has within only a few years become incorporated into almost every social policy field (Barthel-Bouchier 2013; Saarinen 2014; Hall et al. 2015; Rutty et al. 2015; Eriksen 2016; Margaryan and Stensland 2017; Jennings 2018).

5. The strong charge and the many versions make sustainability useful for many purposes. By being used so frequently by so many people for so many reasons, sustainability has become increasingly fragmented, ambiguous, and multivalent. However, this has not weakened its scope and applicability; rather, it has further enhanced its ethical and political charge (Williams and Millington 2004). Even though it may not be possible to determine what sustainability is, it is nevertheless possible to determine that it is important and valuable. This unbeatable combination is what makes sustainability so productive. Following the Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969), sustainability can be described as 'a vessel of meaning,' a container that can be continually filled with new content. Both the boundaries of the vessel and its content are symbolic constructions that enable people to express and create meaning. The size of the vessel and its capacity depend on the strength of the value that holds it together. With values as strong as the ones in sustainability, the vessel can remain intact and even be reinforced, despite the constant renewal and addition of content.

In effect, sustainability, much like peace, democracy, development, progress and a number of other 'grand' concepts, has become a floating signifier (Laclau 1990, 28), encompassing many and often conflicting meanings. Together, the many versions form a complicated and contradictory 'space of tensions' (Lundberg, Malm and Ronström 2003) of strongly charged relationships. These relationships can function both negatively and positively, in complementary and exclusive ways, and can be both encompassing and subordinating.

6. Sustainability is an abstraction and, like all abstractions, it is conditioned by absence. Its absence is underscored by being positioned in the realm of becoming, in an unspecified future. The concept's future orientation opens up specific horizons of expectation (Koselleck 2004) and introduces actions directed towards an absent potential space (Ronström 1998; Winnicott 2005). Consequently, sustainability becomes not only the goal of such actions but also a compass that delineates the necessary paths and directions forward in time and space to achieve this goal. The outcome will depend on which temporalities and time scales prevail (Kverndokk et al. 2021). Thereby, sustainability becomes a battleground centered on time and the future.

7. Sustainability is inherently a positive idea. Although perceived by many as yet another imposition from above, yet another burden to bear in ordinary everyday life, sustainability comes as a dim or diffuse vision, a goal to strive for, a promise of a world freed from threats that may be less visible and dramatic than nuclear bombs, but as potentially disastrous.

8. Another fundamental aspect, especially of strong sustainability, is urgency. A core of its agency is a moral imperative that sets up the world as one, establishes a totalising 'we,' and compels us all to 'act NOW or it will be too late!' This is a risky position. What generations of ethnologists and folklorists have shown in relation to cultural memory, tradition, and heritage is how such 'we's' and the impetus to 'act now!' only too easily set reflection aside, reduce complexity, and turn a blind eye to the consequences.

**Narratives**

9. Since sustainability is abstractly absent and lacks empirical concreteness, it will have to be externalised and given concrete form by means of some kind of semiotic system, through words or images, music and movements. Whatever we might think sustainability is, its natural habitat is discourse, story, and narrative. Its agency will depend on how narratives establish positions, directions and temporalities (Andersson and Westholm 2019; Asplund Ingemark 2021; Kverndokk et al. 2021). Much like 'progress' and 'modernity,' sustainability begs to be articulated in stories with a beginning, complication, resolution, and end, and with a clear moral point: sustainability is good, therefore sustainability will prevail (cf. Eriksen 1995, 41). Thus, the essence and meaning of sustainability will necessarily have to be approached through studies of the concrete, local arenas and contexts where it is articulated, negotiated and fixated, from noisy battles to low-key talks and silent agreements. In its various versions, sustainability may both interact with and reinforce already established

discourses and practices in different social areas, and at the same time subordinate, challenge and radically transform them.

10. A common way of perceiving sustainability is as a sum of abstract systemic properties, how systems operate or should operate together. When systems function properly, 'as they should,' these properties are normalised and remain silent in the background. Hence, sustainability is most evidently activated, articulated, and fixated through its negation, when a system is threatened, fails, is malfunctioning, or is out of order and therefore is to be considered unsustainable.

Some general types of contexts in which sustainability is commonly evoked are in connection to disaster, shortage, and crisis (i.e. Tierney et al. 2006; Lindahl 2012; 2019; Kverndokk 2017; Bjerregaard and Kverndokk 2018); eradication and reduced diversity; injustices, unequal distribution of resources, major and/or rapid changes; overheating, when something approaches a 'tipping point' and therefore risks collapsing (Eriksen 2016).

Throughout its history, the notion of sustainability has been shaped by various crises, shortages, and threats. The rapid population growth and increasing consumption following the Industrial Revolution, coupled with the danger of resource depletion—such as wood, coal, and oil—boosted awareness of the need for sustainable resource use (Du Pisani 2006, 85–87). A series of ecological crises paved the way for the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987, which promoted 'sustainable development' as a compromise between the previously incompatible notions of 'development' and 'conservation.' In the twenty-first century, fears of an accelerating climate crisis led to the formulation of Agenda 2030 and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by the United Nations in 2015. With Agenda 2030, the world gained not only a common definition of sustainability but also a benchmark for what should be considered right and good, akin to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

Given that sustainability is an abstraction born out of acute scarcity and crisis, sustainability narratives are often marked by both a positive, visionary mode and a dystopian, alarmist mode, "in expectation of an imminent ecological catastrophe" (Du Pisani 2006, 89).

11. Narrative is a concept that is useful to many: It is a source of knowledge, a type of empirical material, a perspective, a method to gain knowledge, and an agent or actant in its own right. Narratives come in plenty, both wide and narrow, and in many forms. There are the 'high-order narratives' – grand narratives, master narratives, meta-narratives, signature stories – and there are the 'low-order narratives' – stories, micronarratives, utterances. Here, for the sake of discussion, I use the term 'narrative' as a broad descriptive term encompassing all these various types of stories, storytelling, and discourse.

A general problem with much discussion of narrative in popular culture and the social sciences is that it is based on a generative model that establishes a fundamental division between an abstract, latent level (underlying, behind, or above) that generates and determines the outcomes at concrete and manifest levels. Narrative, then, becomes a term for a primary abstract and generic category (as in 'master narrative' or 'the

narrative of Western civilisation'), while what is actually narrated is seen as secondary utterances, stories, and discourses.

Although the distinction between latent and manifest levels established by the generative model can often be defended analytically, it is nonetheless empirically untenable. Whether thoughts or expressions come first is ultimately an insoluble chicken-and-egg question. Since words and narratives simultaneously express and transform the world, narratives are best approached as events, primary objects of investigation in their own right, a method long practised by folklorists and ethnologists.

There are many good reasons to study narratives. To name a few, narratives may:

- simultaneously express and shape our understanding of the world;
- enable communication about specific and complex issues;
- provide social, spatial and temporal coordinates to perceive and manoeuvre in everyday life;
- transfer values and norms;
- point out desired future changes;
- connect what happens to what has happened and what may happen in the future;
- provide frames, reference points and instructions – 'maps for action' (Dégh and Vaszonyi 1983);
- justify and legitimise individual actions and collective social practices;
- trigger innovation and change (Veland et al. 2018; Guske et al. 2019);
- organise time, actants, heroes and villains, plots and thereby organise meaning.

12. Metaphors play a decisive role in how we deal with difficult, abstract notions in narratives. Because sustainability is such an elusive entity, metaphors play a particularly important role in how it is articulated and understood. Metaphor commonly means saying one thing while intending another, its essence being "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." A metaphor is not simply a matter of language, "a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish," but a mode of thought, a conceptual construction active in understanding and shaping the way we think and act (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 3–5). Among commonly evoked metaphors in sustainability discourse are:

- 'Journey,' a particularly common metaphor that sets up a transitional plot, with a beginning—nature in balance, a complication—environmental threat, a resolution—change of behaviour, and an open positive ending—nature in balance (Milne et al. 2006; Atanasova 2020).
- 'Green,' as in 'green transition,' 'green energy,' or 'Amazon's green lungs.'
- 'War,' as in 'fighting climate change' or 'fighting pollution' (Terra Institute 2024).
- 'Ecological footprint,' offering "a snapshot of what sustainability would require today using existing technologies" (Karlsson 2015).
- 'Spaceship Earth' and 'Planet Earth,' where the environment is the life-support system of humans and other species, and there are limits to growth (Princen 2010).

- 'The child, our children,' the innocent child as a personification of our responsibilities for the future (Kverndokk 2017).

Metaphors like these are not neutral but potent agents with the capacity to facilitate conversations, stimulate imagination, make difficult topics more accessible, activate emotions, suggest interpretations, and ultimately influence decisions and actions. Thus, as is often pointed out by sustainability advocates, it matters which metaphors are used.

## A Widening Gap between Possibility and Reality, and the Role of Narratives to Overcome It

13. A common observation is that the world is not changing quickly enough to reach the sustainability goals already adopted by the international community. A whole series of theories have been launched to explain why the accumulated knowledge seems to be so difficult to absorb and translate into action. These range from systems theory (path dependence), psychology (cognitive assonance), to communication theory (fake news, alternative facts, incompatibility, untranslatability) and cultural theory (rigid structures, culture clash, false consciousness, hegemony). Also the growing interest in sustainability and narratives in recent years has been fuelled particularly by observations of a widening 'information deficit' (Veland et al. 2018), a term for the increasingly dramatic gap between knowledge and action, arising from politicians and the general public either denying or failing to adequately absorb and understand research findings on the extent of human environmental and climate impact.

14. In a study of utopian ideas in the Western world over 500 years, the historian of ideas Ronny Ambjörnson notes how far-reaching utopian ideas take shape and spread especially at times when there is a growing gap between possibility and reality, when the accumulated knowledge cannot be fully realised and utilised because of society's organisation (Ambjörnsson 2005, 77). We are now, I suggest, in the midst of a time in several ways conditioned by such a growing gap between possibility and reality, a time when the accumulated knowledge about climate change, $CO_2$ overload, pollution, water and food shortage, decreasing biodiversity and more cannot be fully realised, because of the way politics and economies are organised.

15. Numerous studies (e.g. Herrick and Pratt 2013; McNall and Basile 2013; Chabay 2015; Marshall 2015; Frank 2017; Martek et al. 2018; Veland et al. 2018) assign a crucial role of narrative in bridging this gap between scientific knowledge and everyday reality, and ultimately between possibility and reality.[1] It is argued that communication about climate change and future sustainable development must follow "narrative rules, with recognizable actors, motives, causes and effects" (Marshall 2015, 233). These studies suggest that while better communication of scientific results is necessary and important, achieving sustainable development in the future will require closer studies of

[1] Many of these studies are based on the problematic division between latent ideas and manifest utterances, which reduces narrative to a matter of medium for the communication of already conceived ideas.

sustainability narratives as such—their content, structure, metaphors, and potential consequences.

16. There is undoubtedly a need to study words, concepts, and narratives to understand sustainability, how it is used, by whom and for what purposes. Moreover, I contend, there is also an urgent need for a more proactive approach to enable the transition to sustainability. One of a growing number of researchers advocating for the active use of narrative to enable sustainability is Staffan Laestadius, a Swedish professor of industrial development. In his book on the climate crisis and the post-fossil society, Laestadius underscores that addressing the climate crisis involves both a reactive struggle to mitigate the crisis and a proactive effort to create a post-fossil society. The dilemma is that the climate crisis is not yet threatening enough to most people's everyday lives, and that it is so difficult to imagine a post-fossil society that is attractive and desirable. What we need, Laestadius argues, are visions, stories about the future that "illustrate the complexity and diversity of what we strive for. They must appear plausible and possible. They must have a certain degree of reasonableness and probability and preferably be based on different types of clear scenarios. Instead of forecasts […] about how it will be, the stories must illustrate how it can be and how we want it to be" (Laestadius 2021, 242f.; my translation).

One could also argue that Laestadius perceives the visionary narratives he advocates mostly as media, translations of scientific, technical and economic research. But his point is still, as I understand it, that narrative matters, and that the lack of concrete positive visionary narratives about a sustainable future is therefore particularly significant.

Other researchers in the same vein emphasise the importance of metaphors. Environmental policy specialist Thomas Princen (2010, 60) argues that "through metaphor, proponents of sustainable consumption can shift from a worldview that is linear, mechanistic, reductionist, expansionist, and consumerist to one that is cyclic, organic, complex, constrained and, shall we say, productive or self-generating." After discussing common 'growth' metaphors that he believes should be avoided for being "devoid of ecological content and tend[ing] to separate humans from nature" (Princen 2010, 62), he suggests using a number of new metaphors with ecological content that "connect human action to the workings of natural systems […] evoke the desired image, suggest a desirable path, prompt useful behavior, suggest their own limits, and resist stretching beyond these limits" (Princen 2010, 65).

What these and other researchers are calling for is, in my reading, no less than a comprehensive, full-fledged ethnological and folkloristic research program on narratives about sustainability, and on sustainability as narratives. Such a research program would have to focus on how sustainability is articulated and shaped in everyday life, as stories, narratives, discourses, as metaphors and other tropes, and as actions, materialities, and artefacts. It would have to focus also on the (meta-)narratives about the importance of sustainability narratives that researchers such as Laestadius and Princen put forward. And last but not least, it would have to focus on sustainability stories as active agents in their own right in the transition to sustainability.

**The Complexity of Sustainability and the Challenge of Communication**

17. I have highlighted several aspects that make sustainability a unique concept. Sustainability is universalising and totalising, encompassing and all-inclusive. It potentially expands the world vertically to embrace not only human civilisations but all existing life within the biosphere as a whole. It is a fundamentally positive concept, representing a vision of a better future society, setting forth goals to strive for and pathways to achieve these goals. The struggle for a sustainable world is as much a struggle over what sustainability is as when it should be achieved, and which time horizons should apply. It is an abstract concept whose most striking features are absence and silence. Sustainability is most clearly articulated as a negation, in unsustainable situations calling for action: crisis, war, disaster, etc. In its strongest form, the transition to sustainability is imperative and urgent—there are no alternatives. If nothing is done now, the world as we know it is headed for its imminent demise.

With such a unique and complex concept, it is not surprising that the discourse surrounding it is also unique and complex. This is true not least regarding the idea of a gap, a mismatch between objective facts and subjective worldviews, and how it can be bridged. The idea seems reasonable enough: despite the collective knowledge in the world being more than sufficient regarding what needs to be done, too little is done and too slowly. This idea is supported by common experiences of the inertia of everyday life: even if we know better, or should have known better, it is easier and more convenient to continue along well-known paths and do what we have always done. A common understanding is that to overcome the apparent gap between knowledge and action, between possibility and reality, we will require more research, better communication of the results, better metaphors, and more powerful narratives.

18. It might certainly be the case that better communication, metaphors, and stories can make a difference. However, there is more to it. Firstly, the gap is itself a powerful, active metaphor that not only highlights a problem but also suggests bridging activities to overcome it, such as more research and better communication of the results. Secondly, the gap metaphor posits a privileged position of knowledge from above, with sufficient information about the state of the world and what needs to be done, and a subordinate position that has insufficient or incorrect information. Thirdly, the solution imposed by the metaphor places agency and responsibility on the privileged part: if only the experts package their findings better and tell their stories more convincingly using the right kinds of narrative forms, metaphors, genres, and media, the information deficit can be reduced, and the gap bridged.

19. In a study of the relationship between everyday reality and structure, sociologist Göran Ahrne points to a crucial difference between the realities of everyday life and the abstract structures where power accumulates. While power is cumulative, everyday reality is repetitive. Everyday life has a different rhythm and takes place in contexts fundamentally different from those of cumulative processes: "In the daily routines of everyday reality, structural processes are recreated. Everyday life creates the foundations of power, without being able to accumulate power itself." The result, Ahrne

argues, is that "power's decisions become increasingly abstract in the short term and thus uninteresting to the individual, but increasingly important in the long term" (Ahrne 1981, 13–14).

20. A fourth problem is that the gap metaphor presents two sides of a symmetrical relationship, sides that are now for some reason separated but which are, in principle and with the right methods, possible to connect. What Ahrne highlights is a different picture altogether, of two fundamentally different levels tied together in an asymmetric relation, one characterised by repetition and the other by accumulation. The insight is simple: scale and scope matter. Sustainability discourse that deals with global processes on an abstract level is not easily transferred to local, concrete everyday levels. How a local everyday activity like the daily drive to the office and back contributes to global warming is not easily observable. To enable a transition to sustainability, more attention will be required on how knowledge and experiences can be transferred between levels that are not immediately compatible or congruent. Hence, any attempt to grapple with sustainability must deal with dislocations, transfers, and shifts between radically different kinds of levels, arenas, and domains (Ronström 2014; 2024; Hyltén-Cavallius 2023).

21. There is a growing number of professionals worldwide who are faced with precisely this task, to transfer knowledge between asymmetric, incompatible levels. While there were until recently few sustainability professionals, today there are sustainability managers, officers, consultants, and administrators in almost every large company, NGO, and national, regional, and local administration. It is now possible to foresee and plan a career as a 'sustainability-something' and to find the right education to get there. In their everyday practices, all these new professionals will have to put into action what until recently were mostly abstract concepts, ideas, and images. Thereby, they will inevitably articulate and establish what sustainability is and can be.

There are also several current Scandinavian ethnological research projects dealing with such shifts between radically different levels, among them Hastrup (2021) on sustainable pig production in Denmark, and Kaijser (2021) on narrating environmental crises at public aquariums. What these studies show is how the meaning and relevance of sustainability are constantly negotiated, how narratives and other expressive forms with which sustainability is articulated and given form affect and condition its meaning and relevance, and how shifts, translations, and dislocations change these meanings dramatically.

**Where to Go and What to Do**

22. The transition to sustainability is the great adventure of our time—most likely a bigger step for humankind than any moon landing. As a concerned individual, ethnologist, and folklorist, I believe it is now time to assume a proactive approach and ask where to go from here and what to do. In light of the increasing issues affecting all aspects of life on planet Earth, a question to ponder is how we as ethnologists and

folklorists can enable our disciplines to become active agents in the transition to sustainability in society at large.

One possibility is, as I have argued, to examine how sustainability is articulated in narratives, and pay particular attention to sustainability stories and narratives about sustainability. Ethnologists and folklorists have long dealt intensively with endurance, continuity, and stability, in terms of tradition, folklore, heritage, memory, and culture. We have likewise dealt with power structures and centre-periphery relations, in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, migration, identity politics, and more. By using all the insights accumulated over the years and by applying the theoretical and methodological toolbox of narrative research, it would be possible to provide new perspectives on how sustainability discourses and practices are shifted between the abstract structural level and the level of everyday reality, and thereby—hopefully—contribute to a sustainable transition.

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# KVA ER TROLLSKAP? NYTT BLIKK PÅ KVAM-SEGNA OG SEGNMETODE

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In this article, I examine the landscape background of a particular migratory legend. In this legend, unwelcome trolls or hidden people appear at a certain farm to celebrate Christmas but are chased away by a man with a white bear or a rifle. In Norway, the story is often associated with a farm called *Kvam*. The term 'kvam' refers to a secluded place out of sight, and this trend continues even when the farm is not called *Kvam*. The legend is usually linked to secluded places in forests and mountain valleys. I explain this by noting that we are more likely to imagine supernatural encounters in places we cannot oversee or control. Thus, this legend's location can say something about the concept of supernatural beings in popular tradition. By setting the event in a 'kvam,' the storyteller locates the events in a secluded place within the settlement, bringing the strange phenomena closer and making them more engaging.

**Innleiing og forskingshistorie**

Ei segn som er vidt utbreidd i Noreg, fortel at folket på ein viss gard må flytta heimanfrå kvar julenatt, fordi dei underjordiske skal feire jul der – eller haugafolket, huldrefolket, julereia, juleskreia, julebukkane, trolla, tussane, e.a. Dette blir det slutt på eit år når ein uredd vandringsmann, stundom pilgrim, byd seg til å overnatte der. Trolla blir skremde bort av ein tam (kvit)bjørn som han har med seg, eller han legg seg i skjul og skyt leiaren midt under gildet.

Liknande segner er kjende vidt ikring i Nord- og Mellom-Europa (Christiansen 1922, 27–33; Liestøl 1933). Det norske materialet, med streif over i det internasjonale, blir lagt fram i Christiansen 1922 og 1946 (jf. 1958, 144–58).

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Versjonane kan delast inn i to grupper, der den eine har visse eventyrtrekk, og den andre klårt er segner[1] (om sjangergrensene, sjå t.d. Christiansen 1922, 3–4 og Eriksen og Selberg 2006, 172–75). Asbjørnsen og Moes *Kjætten paa Dovre/Kjetta på Dovre* (1842–1844, 158–59) høyrer til den fyrste gruppa. Ein kvitbjørn jagar huldrefolket/trollfolket, og året etter kjem dei og spør om den store kjetta (kvitbjørnen) framleis er der. Når svaret er at kjetta har fått sju ungar sidan sist, vil dei aldri meir dit. Denne typen kallar Knut Liestøl for «Dovre-segni» (Liestøl 1933, 30–31).

Typen der leiaren for dei ubedne gjestene blir skoten, meiner ein har klårare segntrekk, særleg «i sine Stedsangivelser» (Asbjørnsen og Moe 1852, 500). Den kallar Liestøl for «Kvam-segni» (1933, 30–31), fordi ho så ofte blir heimfesta til ein gard som heiter *Kvam*, *Kvamme* eller *Homme* (*-e* er dativending) – i ulike bygder.

Dette er ikkje så klårt som Liestøl stiller opp. Kvam-namnet finn vi ofte også når kvitbjørnmotivet er med, og ofte har jegeren med seg ein kvit hund e.l. sjølv om han skyt. Ikkje sjeldan kallar granskarane desse segnene under eitt for «Kvam-segna» (t.d. Bø 1993, 80; Baklid 2021, 22). Det kjem eg òg til å gjera.

Når Christiansen i 1922 brukar historisk-geografisk metode for å rekonstruere historia til Kvam-segna, dreg han fram det tyske diktet «Das Schretel und der Wasserbär». Det er skrive like før 1300, basert på munnleg tradisjon, og fortel ei historie som liknar Kvam-segna: Ein mann er på reise med ein kvitbjørn. Dei søker husrom ein stad der verten ikkje er herre i eige hus, fordi eit uvette kjem dit for å steike seg mat og laga bråk om natta. Bjørnen jagar uvettet. Når mannen og bjørnen har fare vidare om morgonen, kjem uvettet og spør om den store kjetta framleis er der. Ja, og no har ho fått fem ungar – og uvettet vil aldri meir koma dit (Christiansen 1922, 29–30, jf. Liestøl 1933, 27–28).

Mannen med kvitbjørn set Christiansen i samband med norrøne historier. Viktigast av dei er den islandske *Tåtten om Audun* (Björn K. Þórólfsson, red. 1943). Den fortel at ein islending på 1060-talet kjem til kong Harald Hardråde i Noreg med ein isbjørn, før han fer til Danmark og gjev bjørnen til kong Svein Estridsson. Så fer han sørover som pilgrim. I det tyske diktet er kvitbjørnføraren på veg til kongen av Danmark med bjørnen som gåve frå kongen av Noreg.

Christiansen 1922 stiller opp denne utviklingsskissa: Ei segn om ein vandringsmann med bjørn eksisterte i Danmark på 1200-talet, og der vart helten kopla til den historiske Audun og kongsgåva. Den nye versjonen spreidde seg så til Noreg, der ho vart «assimilert av et ganske andet sagn, om besøk av troll og haugefolk ved juletider, et sagn som har forbindelse med Kvam-gaarder». Denne segna slukte «bjørnetrækkersagnet», som derfor finst «i mere utpræget form» berre nordaust i Sør-Noreg (Christiansen 1922, 33).

Liestøl (1933) sluttar seg til dette, men framhevar pilgrimselementet og den mytiske rolla Dovrefjell har spela i norsk-islandsk forteljetradisjon. «Dovre-segni» har tyngdepunkt i bygdene ved Dovrefjell, der pilgrimsvegen til Nidaros ville gjera at ho spreidde seg lett. Hodne (2004, 158–59) følgjer Liestøl.

[1] Som eventyr er historia AT 1161 i Aarne-Thompson klassifikasjonssystem (Hodne 1984, 219). I Christiansens segnkatalog (1958, 144) er nummeret 6015.

Når Christiansen kjem att til denne segnkrinsen i 1946 (70–94), er han på veg bort frå diffusjonismen. No peikar han på versjonane der huldrefolket/trollfolket kjem frå eit visst fjell/ei viss høgd/ein viss haug, namngjeven i segna. Eller, seier Christiansen, så ligg garden som segna er knytt til, nær eit fjell eller i eit fjellrikt område, eller namnet knyter garden til fjell, ås eller haug: *Oppåsen*, *Kvåle* (< *hóall*, 'haug'), *Bjøberg*, *Åbjørg*, o.fl. (ibid, 89).

Dette set Christiansen i samband med den norrøne trua på at ein etter døden kunne slutte seg til ættefellesskapen i eit fjell i bygda (ibid, 89–90). Dette er fyldigast skildra i samband med Helgafell i *Eyrbyggja saga* 1935 (9–10). Christiansen ser dette i samanheng med den sørsamiske trua på at ein kan leva vidare hos eit slag huldrefolk kalla *saajve* i fjell (1946, 93–94; jf. Heide 2022) og den norrøne ideen om at den døde kunne koma att frå gravhaugen (Christiansen 1946, 90–93). Han kjem fram til at Kvam-segna «suggests some kind of connection with an annual memorial feast for the dead» (Christiansen 1946, 71, 94). Motivet med tam (kvit)bjørn er då sekundær innblanding i ei heimleg, førkristen segn (ibid, 70–71, 79).

At Kvam-segna i Noreg eksisterte minst så tidleg som på 1300-talet, forankrar både Christiansen og Liestøl i namneformene *Kvam*(*me*) og *Homme*, uttala «håmme». Begge kjem av *hvammr*. Lengst sør i Noreg, frå Telemark til Dalane i Rogaland, blir *hva-* til *hå-* i visse tilfelle. *Kvam*(*me*) og *Homme* er altså same ord. Men det må ein vera filolog for å sjå, og derfor må segna ha spreidd seg før *v*-bortfallet i *hva-* > *hå* (Liestøl 1933, 30). Dét tok til i fyrste helvta av 1300-talet (Indrebø 1951 [før 1942], 234, 154; jf. Christiansen 1922, 21; 1946, 72; Liestøl 1933, 30).

Kvam-segna er ikkje kjend frå Island, men norrøn litteratur nemner ein *hvammr* på Vest-Island, der mystiske ting skjer (Matthías Þórdarson og Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, 92–93; Christiansen 1946, 88–89; Jónas Kristjánsson, Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Ólafur Halldórsson og Peter Foote 2003, 9–10).

## Mitt forslag

### *Landskapsanalyse*

Eg skal ikkje jakte på vandringsvegar, opphavleg form eller kjelde for motiv. Dette er fåfengt, og spelar inga rolle for mitt poeng. I staden skal eg prøve å prøve å kaste lys over segna gjennom det påfallande gardsnamnet og analyse av landskapet på stadene segna er knytt til. Kvifor akkurat *Kvam*? Eg meiner det finst eit godt svar på det, og at det svaret kan minne oss på kva trollskap og heidenskap kulturelt sett er. Samtidig håpar eg svaret kan vekke interesse for ei side av folketradisjon som er lite granska, nemleg landskapsbakgrunnen som ulike tradisjonselement kan ha. Det blir ein del stadnamntolking, men dette er ikkje noko mål. Målet er landskapet forteljarane har plassert segnene inn i og korleis forteljarane har oppfatta det. Stadnamn er ei kjelde til det, slik kart og andre opplysningar om stadene er det.

Liestøl er lite interessert i punkta i landskapet. Christiansen spør derimot, i 1922 (8): «Hvad er det som bevirker at […vandresagn] knytter sig til et bestemt sted eller til en

bestemt skikkelse» «i en ny bygd eller et nyt distrikt?» Spørsmålet ser ut til å motseia diffusjonismen som rådde i folkloristikken den gongen. Likevel var det innanfor paradigmet, fordi svara Christiansen såg, ikkje gjaldt landskapet sjølv, men førestillingar folk knytte til stadene. Om Brakandalen i Telemark, seier Christiansen t.d. at tradisjonen om at det var «huldrint» der, «kan […] ha[…] bidraget til […] at trække vort sagn dit» (ibid, 22; jf. 48. *Huldrint*: 'underleg, forgjort'). *Kvifor* sa tradisjonen at det var «huldrint» i Brakandalen? Hadde det ingen ting med staden sjølv å gjera, uavhengig av dei vandrande kulturelementa?

I 1946-forslaget til Christiansen spelar landskapet sjølv ei stor rolle. Sant nok er det *førestillingar* han forklarer segnene ut frå, men særmerkte fjell og haugar er ein sjølvstendig del av dei førestillingane. Problemet er at forslaget stemmer berre med delar av materialet. Berre mindretalet av segnene seier det er ein knatt eller eit fjell ovanfor garden der troll-/ huldrefolket kjem frå – særleg dersom vi tek med den overlappande Halten-segna (nedanfor). Andelen veks litt om vi tek med gardane som heiter *Kvål* eller *Hvål*, slik Christiansen er inne på i 1922 (21), fordi dette kjem av *hóall*, 'haug.' Men forklaringa på dette kan òg vera at *Kvål* er eit namn som liknar *Kvam*, slik Christiansen òg føreslår (ibid, 21). Kanskje forklarer dette òg *Kvanvik* (ibid, 15) vest for Flekkefjord. I alle høve, førestillingar om forfedreberg kan vanskeleg vera poenget i Kvam-segna.

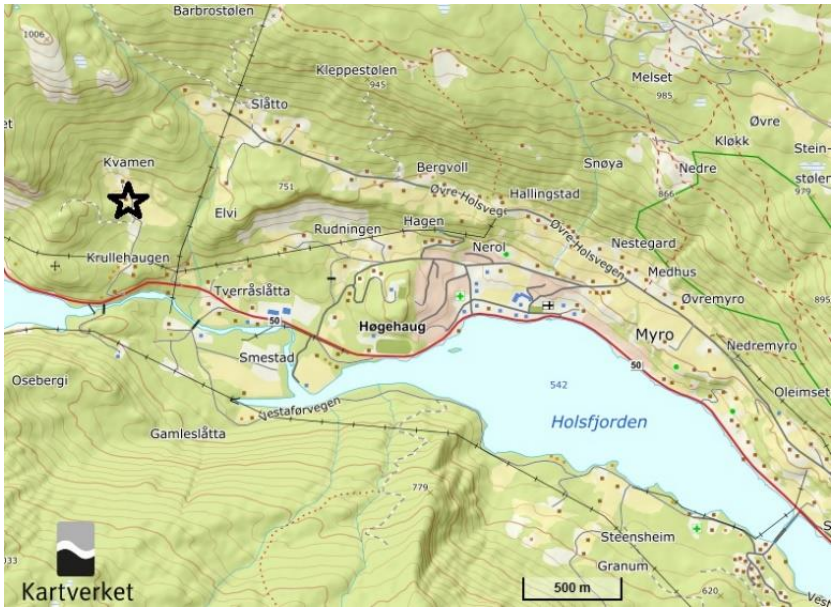
Terrengformasjonen kvam har heller ikkje noko med markant topp eller haug å gjera. Kvifor er då segna så ofte knytt til gardar med dette namnet? Etter mitt syn ligg svaret i kva ein kvam er. Aasen seier det er «en Afkrog, en Dal eller Vig, som er omgivet af høie Bakker, saa at man ikke kan see den i nogen Frastand» (Aasen 1873, 399). Ein kvam er altså ein avsides stad utan innsyn, sjå figur 1 og 2.

Den same landsskapstendensen ser vi òg vanlegvis når Kvam-segna er knytt til ein gard som *ikkje* heiter Kvam. Dette vil eg no prøve å vise med å gå gjennom lista over dei gardane hos Christiansen 1922 og 1946. Landskapsopplysningar har eg frå norgeskart.no, og litteraturopplysningar ofte frå det digitaliserte arkivet til det norske Nasjonalbiblioteket. Eg kommenterer alle gardsnamna bortsett frå dei Christiansen rimeleg forklarer som mistyding (1922, 22).

Gunnarstad på Vestre Bokn i Rogaland (Christiansen 1946, 82) ligg i grisgrendt strok i ein landskapsformasjon som godt kunne kallast kvam: Ein kort dal med haugar framom. Seim i Årdal i Sogn (ibid 1922, 17) liknar 2, i ei vik på sida av ein fjordbotn. Husmannsplassen Lønvik i Sauherad (ibid 1946, 81) ligg i ei trong, djup vik med høge bakkar ikring.

Oppåsen i Solår (ibid, 72–73) ligg med skog rundt oppå ein høg ås. Åslandsøygard i Åseral (ibid 1922, 14) ligg høgt oppe i lia bak ein rygg, usynleg frå bygda. Liknande ligg Brakandalen i Kviteseid (ibid, 13; Faye 1948 [1844], 31), Esbjug i Nordre Land (Esbjøk. Christiansen 1922, 11),[2] Åbjør i Valdres (ibid), Hestad ved Langfjorden i Molde (ibid 1946, 86), og Kletta i Kvinnherad (ibid 1922, 16). Kletta ligg øvst i bygda, inn mot ein fjelldal.

[2] Dette gjeld Øvre Esbjug, som «er den gamle Esbjug-garden» (Ødegard 1997, 255).




Figur 1. Kvamen i Hallingdal. Norgeskart.no. Ekvidistanse 20 m.

Figur 2. Kvommo, Nord-Hordland. Norgeskart.no. Ekvidistanse 20 m.

Dette minner om Otrehjell i Fresvik i Sogn (ibid 1946, 84), som ligg øvst i ein sidedal, og Bjøberg i Hemsedal (ibid 1922, 12; 1946, 89). Av same type er truleg garden «paa Dovrefjeld» hos Asbjørnsen og Moe (1842–1844, 158–59). Dette er helst Hjerkinn eller Vesl-Hjerkinn (Sletbak 1977, 24–25), som ligg som Bjøberg, på grensa til høgfjellet.

Mange av gardane ligg avsides i skogslandskap. Klåre døme er Øv(er)land (Christiansen 1922, 13) i Årmotdalen ovanfor Bø og Brakandalen (ibid), høgt over Kviteseidvatnet. Begge stadene vart tidleg fråflytte. Fjellgrenda Skafså i Telemark (ibid) ligg likeins som Brakandalen, over Bandak.

Manneråk vest for Øyslebø (ibid, 15, 22), Indre Agder, ligg åleine i skogen på heia mellom to bygder. Det same gjeld Linjord i Åseral (ibid 1946, 81), Brasstad i Lyngdal og Mølland i Iveland (ibid). På liknande vis ligg Grøsfjell i Dalane i Rogaland (ibid 1922, 15). Skogseid i Hålandsdalen i Hordaland (ibid: 16, 1946: 83) fell i same kategori.

Vea på Karmøy i Rogaland (ibid 1946, 82) ser ut til å ha lege bortgøymt i gammal tid, om enn ikkje i dag. Namnet kjem av «*Viðir, Fl[er]t[al] af Viðr m., Skov» (Rygh og Olsen 1915, 379), og fortel at skog vart oppfatta som særmerkt for området garden ligg i. Skjekkeland (Christiansen 1922: 22) i Kvinesdal er liknande tilfelle. Namnet blir forklart av gammalnorsk *skekill*, «Udkant» (Rygh og Kjær 1912, 298), som «garden i utkanten» (Høyland 1972, 50).

Kili (Killi) i Dovre (Christiansen 1946, 74–75) ligg midt i bygda, synleg for alle. Men i mellomalderen låg husa over 100 m høgre (Dahl m. fl. 1997, 26). Dermed låg Kili høgst i bygda, ved ein liten sidedal, jf. Otrehjell – der eine ferdavegen mot Trøndelag svinga opp i fjellet mot Hardbakken (Dahl, m. fl., 1997, 26. Dombås-vegen kom på 1800-talet).

Denne forklaringa føreset at det ikkje stemmer at fjellvegen nordover frå Kili, no kalla Kongevegen, er frå 1400-talet, medan gamlevegen svingar opp i fjellet frå Tofte, eit par km lenger sør. Det er den som blir kalla Gautstigen (Dahl 1995, 20; Dahl, m. fl., 1997, 6; Brox og Leren 2014, 115–16).

Grunnlaget for dette synet verkar veikt. Det er rimelegare om Gautstigen og Hardbakk-vegen frå eldste tid var alternative ruter, slik det fanst over Hardangervidda (Fønnebø 1988, 112, 118, 133). Gautstigen går på tørr grunn, men svært høgt, slik fleire peikar på (Dahl, m. fl., 1997, 6; Brox og Leren 2014, 93–95), med høgste punkt oppunder 1500m. Vegen over Hardbakken ligg lågt i jamføring, med mykje ly av skog. Då må folk mange dagar ha føretrekt den låge ruta frå Kili. Kongevegen kan ha kamuflert at den er gammal.

Fleire moment stemmer best med at det gjekk ein gammal veg frå Kili. 1700-talskjelder seier garden tidlegare heitte Dovre (Dahl 1995, 21–22, Dahl, m. fl., 1997, 26), og då er det rimelegast om vegen over *Dovrefjell* tok til der. Dette høver godt med at *Kili* truleg speglar same tanke. Det er stivna dativ av *kjǫlr* (Rygh og Kjær 1902, 5), som vart brukt om «fjellovergang» (Rygh 1898, 60).

Dersom Kili var den opphavlege Dovre-garden, så høver det òg godt med namnet *Dofrar*/*Dovre*. Kva det kjem av, er uvisst (Sandnes 1997). Men det skal ha samanheng med tysk *Tobel*, «liten skogsdal, kløft», og gammalslavisk *dubri*, «skogsdal, kløft» (Rygh og Kjær 1902, 25; Torp 1919, 80). Formelt ser dette fint ut, og det høver på Kili, som ligg

ved ein skogfylt bekkedal. Same landskapstrekket finn vi ved andre namn av same rot (Rygh og Kjær 1902, 25, 255; Brevner 1942, 81–86).

Det ser altså ut til at Kili er ein parallell til Bjøberg, endå om fjellvegen stig bråare i Dovre enn i Hemsedal. Kili ligg ikkje bortgøymt i ein fjell- eller skogsdal. Men han ligg på spranget inn i slikt lende.

Forstått slik, blir Kili òg ein parallell til Løfall (Christiansen 1946, 85) sør for Sande i Sunnfjord. Løfall ligg ikkje avsides. Men viktigaste ferdavegen Sunnfjord – Sogn tok av der, mot Vadheim (Losnegård m. fl. 1999, 49, Hoprekstad 1938, 40).

Bjøberg og Løfall er òg ganske parallelle til Bottem (Bottheim) i Lesja (Christiansen 1922, 10; 1946, 88). Garden ligg ikkje ute av syne frå bygda, men i austenden, der breibygda smalnar inn til eit skard over til Dombås. I småskala og utan stigninga, liknar dette fjelldalane frå Bjøberg og Løfall. Dette kjem òg til syne i **Botnheimr* (Rygh og Kjær 1902, 27).

Når eg sjekkar landskapet rundt gardane Kvam-segna er knytt til utan at dei heiter *Kvam* – så finn eg at så godt som alle (men sjå nedanfor) ligg ganske eller veldig avsides, med lite innsyn – eller ved vegar som fører ut i avsides landskap. Det same ser vi i namnlause tilfelle: Det skjedde på «ein einbølt gard ein stad» eller på ein «ensom skogsgaard» (Christiansen 1946, 82; 1922, 28).

*Kva idéar ligg bak landskapstendensen?*

Kvifor blir Kvam-segna, gjennom Kvam-namnet og elles, knytt til slike stader? Eg meiner det er fordi det kjennest meir naturleg at utrulege og overnaturlege ting skjer på stader vi ikkje har oversikt og kontroll over. At slike fenomen dukkar opp nett på slike stader, ser vi i alle slag tradisjonar.

*Soga om Eirik Raude*, fortald frå Island med handling i kristningstida, har slåande mykje trollskap og heidenskap på Grønland og i Vinland. Dette var landa lengst unna Island og kristendomen (Matthías Þórdarson og Einar Ól. Sveinsson, red. 1935, 206–9, 214–17, 221–26, 231–32).

Bohuslän: «när hela landet blivit kristet, vantrivas trollen och fly norrut, vanligen til Dovre fjäll» (Liestøl 1933, 39). Danmark: «Da her blev bygget saa mange Kirker i Landet, at Klokkernes Lyd kunde høres overalt, da kunne […] Bjergfolk, Ellefolk og Nisser ikke være her længer. De flyttede […] op i Norge» (Grundtvig 1944 [før 1884], 71).

Noreg: Ein mann som blir bjørn innimellom, bur på «ein avsølt ['solfattig'] plass like under fjellet» (Liestøl 1939, 84–85). Nøkken viser seg ved «ein gard som låg einsleg i ein skog» (ibid, 135). I eit skard som presten må ri mellom to bygder, er det noko som held hesten att (Mauland 1928, 88). Ein mann får sjå huldra når han er åleine på fjellet og slår (ibid, 103). Ei jente går gjennom «ein stor skog» og får høyre uforklarleg felelåt (ibid, 125).

Søker vi på «avsides» i segner.no, får vi treff som dette: «Det var vel ingen stad huldrene lika seg så godt som i den avsides Vakadalen» (Haugland 1985). Søker vi på «heia», får vi 22 treff (28.5.2024). Flesteparten handlar om møte med overnaturlege skapningar og kor dette skjer. Her er eine treffet: «I mørke haustnetter dreiv huldrene

og treska i Lusabergknuten. Folk fælte slik […] at det var sjeldan nokon torde ferdast over denne heia utan ved høgljos dag» (Strand historielag 2012).

Innanfor dei same tankebanane er det at huldrefolket flytter inn på setrane om hausten (t.d. Mauland 1928, 98–99, 112). Då blir setrane ledige, for folk flytter til bygda – og bygdefolket mistar innsynet i kva som skjer på setrane.

Langs same linjer kan vi sjå versjonen av Kvam-segna som blir kalla Halten-segna, etter Halten på Trøndelagskysten (t.d. Byberg 1970, 58–72. Nummer 6015A i Christiansens segnkatalog, 1958, 156–58). Mest kjende versjon er «Tuftefolket på Sandflesa» (Asbjørnsen 1859, 267–76). I den blir ein ung mann etterlaten utan båt i eit utvær. Han klarer seg fram til julaftan, og då kjem tuftefolket seglande for å feire. Mannen legg seg på lur og skyt leiaren, får rikdomen og båten, og seglar heim.

Christiansen (1946, 82, 87) noterer seg overlappinga med Kvam-segna, men stoppar der. Årsaka var vel, i 1922, at Halten-segna ville rote til forslaget om vandringsvegar; og i 1946, at ho ville torpedere det nye tolkingsforslaget. Som Christiansen sa: «This story […] has lost the connection with the farm and the hill» (ibid, 87).

Tuftefolket hadde tydelegvis alltid feira jul på Sandflesa, Halten, osb. Men ingen visste om det før den unge mannen stranda der, sidan slike stader låg utanfor det ein hadde innsyn i, når det ikkje var sesongfiske.

Kanskje kan Halten-versjonen kaste lys over at Kvam-segna i eitt tilfelle blir knytt til den vesle øya Idsal (Christiansen 1946, 82) i Ryfylke. Idsal ligg ikkje ute av syne for bygdene rundt. Men ho ligg plassert som to Halten-segnøyar: Tautra i Trondheimsfjorden og Foldøy(na) i Ryfylke (Byberg 1970, 86–88). Desse er små og ligg midt uti fjordar, midt mellom bygdene. Dette er parallelt til, i kystlandskapsform, at mange Kvam-segngardar utan Kvam-namn ligg inne på heia mellom bygder.

Dette stemmer òg med Læsø i Kattegat og Samsø mellom dei danske øyane. Desse småøyane ligg slåande midt imellom, og i norrøn litteratur er dei stader der ein møter gudane (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 78; Simek 2006, 194; Heide 2011, 62, 67, 72, 76–78).

Det er ofte mørkt når ein ser overnaturlege skapningar på avsides stader. Eller staden er mørk, fordi han er solfattig. Kvam-segna skjer ikkje berre på avsides stad. I tillegg skjer ho julenatta, den lengste og mørkaste i året. Det overnaturlege skjer altså der vi dobbelt opp ikkje har innsyn.

Liknande funksjon har skodde, når ein på sjøen eller i fjellet kjem til overnaturlege skapningar (t.d. Byberg 1970, 31–52, 163–80). Dei bur gjerne på segnøyar som normalt er under havet, som Ut-Røst. Skodda gjer det vanskeleg å motseia at staden eksisterer.

Kopling mellom stad med lite lys og overnaturlege skapningar, kan kanskje kaste lys (!) over nokre Kvam-segngardar til. Kravik i Numedal (Christiansen 1922, 13) eller Grungedal i Vest-Telemark (ibid, 14) ligg ikkje ute av syne. Men dei ligg i botnen av djupe, innestengde dalar, med bratte lier, 600–1000m høge.

Kanskje er poenget det same i tilfellet Sveine (Christiansen 1922, 11). Er det garden Sveine i Lom, så ligg han midt i glaninga for bygda. Men Kleiven (1894, 31), som var lokalkjend, seier Sveine ligg i Skjåk. Forklaringa kan vera at det er setra Sveine, som ligg i ein sidedal og høyrer til Skjåk. I så fall liknar tilfellet Grungedal.

Det at ein helst tenkjer seg utrulege og overnaturlege ting på stader ein ikkje har oversikt over, heng saman med at gammal tru og skikk held seg lengst der det er liten påverknad frå den store verda, altså avsides stader. Slik må det vera, for der er det vanskeleg for idear eller makthavarar å få kontroll. Til dømes kunne folket i fjellbygda Langlim i Telemark feire 17. mai på vanleg vis gjennom heile okkupasjonen, uforstyrra av tyskarane (Haugsgjerd 2018).

Oppfatninga at gammal tru og skikk held seg lengst i utkantar, kjem ofte til syne. Uvanleg tydeleg er det i ordet *heidning*. Etymologisk er det ein person som bur på heia (Bjorvand og Lindeman 2019, 475). Dette skal vera eit «betydningslån etter lat. *pāgānus* m. 'landboer, bonde'», frå då heidendomen i Romarriket heldt stand berre i distrikta.

I Odd Munks soge om Olav Tryggvason heiter det om kristningstida i Noreg: «Vidt ikring i fjellbygder og avdalar eller i havgapet blota mange til gudebilete i husa sine. Somme trudde på skogar eller berg eller tjørner» (Ólafur Halldórsson, red. 2006, 272, omsett her).

Denne tankegangen er relativ, fordi endå meir avsides stader alltid vil finnast. Sett frå Danmark, er skogs- og fjellandet Noreg generelt utanfor folkeskikken og kristendomen. I dei norske bygdene, vil det vera utpostar i skogane, fjella og på kysten, som har denne statusen. Det bør ha fungert på same måte i førkristen tid.

At Kvam-segna er knytt til avsides stader, er logisk i lys av det eg har skissert ovanfor. Samtidig kan ein meine segna har ei sjølvmotseiing. Gardane som trolla oppsøker julenatta, ligg avsides, men dei ligg òg ofte ved ferdavegar. Eg har nemnt Bjøberg, Kili, Bottem, garden «paa Dovrefjell» som rimelegvis er Hjerkinn, og Løfall. Bjøberg[3] og Hjerkinn er dessutan kjende fjellstover, og fekk den funksjonen fordi dei ligg der dei ligg.

Det gjeld mange andre. Gjennom Brakandalen går ein gammal ferdsleveg mellom Midt- og Vest-Telemark (Heggtveit 1982, 64). Manneråk (Christiansen 1922, 15, 22) ligg ved vegen mellom Øyslebø og Hægebostad. Namnet kjem truleg av **Marnarrák*, der *-rák* (n.) er «stig, veg» (Rygh og Kjær 1902, 113; *Norsk Ordbok* 1966–2016, IX:717). Mølland i Iveland ser ut til å liggja ved ei grein av ein førhistorisk veg (Fjermedal 1962, 118–24; Engesland 2002, 164–70). Linjord i Åseral (Christiansen 1946, 81) ser på kartet ut til å liggja ved ein gammal ferdaveg, likeins Grøsfjell i Dalane (ibid 1922, 15). Kvommo (ibid, 16) ligg der trafikken går mellom Osterfjorden og Hindnesfjorden; figur 2.

Kanskje er dette bakgrunnen for at Lærdal / Leirdal i Vikedal i Nord-Rogaland (ibid, 16) har Kvam-segna knytt til seg. Garden ligg ikkje bortgøymt i dag, men ved ein svært viktig ferdaveg mellom Rogaland og Sunnhordland. I tillegg kan han ha lege bortgøymt i ein ravinedal. Namnet kjem av **Leirdalr* (Rygh og Olsen 1915, 275), og han ligg heilt nedmed elva. Skuggerelieff på hoydedata.no (15.5.24) tyder på at det har vore ravinedalar der som no er utplanerte. Det ville vera eit omfattande arbeid å vise det, men truleg ligg fleirtalet av Kvam-segngardane ved ferdavegar, medrekna sjøvegar på salt- og ferskvatn – om dei då ikkje heiter Kvam og ligg nede i ei bygd. Korleis går det i hop med at slike gardar ligg avsides for at det skal vera naturleg å møte overnaturlege

[3] Kan føreleddet sikte til gjestgjevarverksemda og vera rota i *bjóða* 'by' i dialekten *bjø*? Forslaget til Rygh og Falk (1909, 130) verkar lite rimeleg.

skapningar der? Svaret er vel at det må vera realistisk at ein ferdamann søker nattely der, og at det må vera ein stad som forteljar og publikum har eit forhold til. Utan det, er det ikkje nok om staden er avsides. Løysinga er avsides stader ved ferdavegar. Poenget er då ikkje at dei sjeldan får impulsar frå omverda, berre at dei ligg slik at storsamfunnet ikkje kan følgje med. Stadene er utpostar som storsamfunnet ikkje har oversikt og kontroll over.

**Konklusjon**

For nokre av gardane som Kvam-segna er knytt til, er det diskutabelt om dei høver inn i mønsteret eg peikar på. Det gjeld i alle fall Bottem i Lesja, Sveine i Lom eller Skjåk, Kravik i Numedal, Grungedal i Vest-Telemark, Kvanvik vest for Flekkefjord, Lærdal/Leirdal i Nord-Rogaland, Skjekkeland i Kvinesdal (Christiansen 1922, 10–11, 13–16, 22), Vea på Karmøy, Idsal i Ryfylke og Løfall i Sunnfjord (ibid 1946, 82, 85).

Men, slik eg har vist i drøftinga, *kan* desse gardane òg oppfattast slik at dei ligg eller har lege avsides, med lite innsyn, eventuelt òg ved ferdaveg. Kvanvik kan vera knytt til segna fordi namnet liknar *Kvam*. Det er likevel ikkje nødvendig at alle gardane høver inn. Det er eit klårt mønster uansett.

Christiansen og Liestøl er stundom *inne på* slike poeng som eg peikar på her. Christiansen seier at Kvam-gardane typisk «were just on the border of the hills» som dei ubedne gjestene kom frå (Christiansen 1946, 88). Han seier at Kvam-segngardane som ikkje heiter *Kvam* kan vera ein «"øydgard", a deserted farm, that most likely would be situated in an out of the way place» (ibid, 88). Liestøl legg vekt på at segna er knytt til Dovrefjell, og at dette er villmark, høgt til fjells, osb. (Liestøl 1933, 38–45). Tilsvarande noterer Celander (1943, 98) seg at Kvam-segna ofte er knytt til «ensligt belägna gårdar».

Men ingen av granskarane har tenkt på at slike ting kan vera vesentlege for å forstå segna. Ingen har undersøkt kva ein kvam er, eller funne fram til at Kvam-segna særleg er knytt til stader som er utan innsyn, men som folk likevel har eit forhold til.

Er Kvam-segna berre ein refleks av at vi tenkjer oss det overnaturlege på stader og i situasjonar vi ikkje har oversikt over? Nei, for det er ikkje slik at all folketru er knytt til same type landskapsformasjon. Det er andre typar segner knytte til fossar og hamrar enn til avsides gardar ved ferdavegar. Draug-segner kan vera knytte til stader med spesielt vanskeleg vind eller straum (Mathisen 2003).

Kvifor er segna «vår» så ofte knytt til gardar som heiter *Kvam*? Kvifor seier ikkje forteljarane berre at det skjedde på ein viss gard inne på heia eller i ein fjelldal? – dess lenger unna bygda, dess meir plausibelt? Tja, forteljingar engasjerer oss meir dersom dei gjeld noko nært og kjent. Det snedige med ein kvam er at han er utan innsyn jamvel om han ligg nede i bygda. Dermed kan forteljaren plassere midt iblant oss ei hending vi ville vente skjedde på ein stad langt borte.[4]

Dette har ein forteljar i Noreg innsett ein gong på 1300-talet eller før, og lagt denne finessen inn i segna når han/ho planta ho om til sitt heimemiljø: «Det skjedde på Kvam,

[4] Ein skulle tru gardar med namnet *Løyning*/*Lønning* ville gjort same nytta, sidan det òg uttrykker at staden ligg i skjul. Men dei ligg stort sett ikkje i skjul i bygda, berre innpå heia, skogen, e.l.

like her borte!» Dette vart kopiert av andre forteljarar som hadde ein Kvam-gard i si bygd. Andre måtte få fram det manglande innsynet med å velja ein gard på ei hylle over bygda, inne på heia, e.l.

Heilt frå sjangeren segn vart definert, har ein vore klar over at segner ofte (folkeetymologisk) forklarer stadnamn. Dei siste tiåra har ein del granskarar peika på at segner inngår i eit mentalt kart som heng i hop med det kollektive minnet (m.a. Brink 2001; Gunnell 2009). Mellom anna har ein notert seg at kor ein segnforteljar plasserer eit trugsmål, seier noko om korleis ein opplever landskapet (t.d. Tangherlini 2013, 183–184). Kva rolle stadnamn spelar i segner, er nyleg utforska av Danielsen (2017a og 2017b).

Studiar som set typane av folketru i samanheng med typar av landskapsformasjonar, har det likevel vore få av. Egeler er truleg den som har gått lengst i den retninga (Egeler 2024). Det er neppe tilfeldig at dette er heilt ny forsking. Digitaliserte tekstar og namnebasar kopla til eit mangfald av kartressursar, gjer det no mogeleg, raskt, å sjå mønster det før var vanskeleg å oppdaga. Segner.no har til og med segnene tagga med type terrengformasjon. Tida er inne for djupare innsyn (ja) i korleis segnene er tenkte.

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# WATER TROLLS IN ÁRNESHREPPUR, NORTHERN STRANDIR: A PRELIMINARY MAP AND CATALOGUE

Matthias Egeler*

Terry Gunnell's cartographic work, his studies of the relationship between landscape and storytelling, and his research on the *long durée* connecting medieval literature and modern folk tradition have revolutionised our understanding of Icelandic folklore as a phenomenon that is both eminently local and yet integrated into much wider contexts in time and space, contexts which again and again prove mutually illuminating. In particular, the digital mapping of the major folklore collections in the *Sagnagrunnur* database has opened up completely new possibilities for studying the spatiality of Icelandic folk storytelling (Gunnell and Trausti Dagsson s.a.), which Gunnell also developed in a series of ground-breaking studies (e.g. Gunnell 2009; 2018; 2019; 2020a) and an important collection of essays (Gunnell 2008). In addition to highlighting the centrality of its spatial contexts for understanding folk storytelling, his research furthermore has emphasised that also diachronic contexts need to be carefully considered, which can reach back as far as the pre-Christian mythology of the North (e.g. Gunnell 2014; 2020b). Neither the current rise of research on questions of spatiality (e.g. Sverrir Jakobsson 2017; Valk and Sävborg 2018; Ármann Jakobsson 2020; Egeler and Gropper 2020; Lethbridge 2020; s.a.; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir and Jón Jónsson 2021; Egeler 2024) nor the current strength of the research field investigating the relationship between folklore, sagas, and even pre-Christian mythology (e.g. Sävborg and Bek-Pedersen 2014; Sävborg 2014; 2018) would have been possible without his work.

The present contribution wishes to honour these achievements, and to acknowledge their paradigmatic character also for my own research, on an example where folklore meets issues of spatiality, the mapping approach pioneered by Gunnell, and the question of connections between folklore and medieval storytelling traditions: the

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example of trolls. Trolls have been one of the objects of Terry Gunnell's own work (Pilkington and Gunnell 1999; Gunnell 2001) and stand in the focus of an extensive research discourse (e.g. Schulz 2004; Ármann Jakobsson 2005; 2006; 2009; 2017; 2020; Simek 2018; Ragnhildur Sigurðardóttir et al. 2019; Egeler 2021). Historically, one hotly debated question of research on Icelandic troll traditions has been the striking parallelism between the trolls fought by Grettir the Strong at Sandhaugar and in a cave under a nearby waterfall (*Grettis saga*, chs 64–67; Guðni Jónsson 1936, 209–19) and Beowulf's fight against Grendel and his mother at Heorot and in her cave beneath the "mere." First noticed by Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878, xlix), the significance (or lack thereof) of the striking parallels between this double pair of troll fights has been passionately discussed ever since (cf. Magnús Fjalldal 1998 vs. Liberman 1986; 1999; O'Donoghue 2000). Yet though the question of a connection between *Grettis saga* and *Beowulf* remains contentious even after nearly one and a half centuries of scholarship, the discussion certainly has achieved one thing: to cement the poetic power of both Grettir's and Beowulf's aquatic troll fights in the conscience of at least this reader. Within the wider Old Norse corpus, furthermore, Grettir's and Beowulf's aquatic troll fights under the waterfall and the "mere" have left me with a lingering puzzlement about the memorable scene that plays itself out between Atli and the troll Hrímgreðr in *Helgaqviða Hjǫrvarðzsonar* (Neckel 1962, 140–49; there sts 12–30). After Helgi and Atli have killed the giant (*iǫtunn*) Hati, they spend the night in the fjord Hatafjǫrðr. During Atli's watch, Hati's daughter Hrímgerðr approaches the heroes' ships. Hrímgerðr herself is called various uncomplimentary terms like *gífr* ('female monster, ogress,' st. 15) and *hála* ('troll woman,' st. 16); she herself speaks of her father as a *iǫtunn* (st. 17). Supported by her mother, who has kept the heroes from leaving the fjord by immobilising their ships (st. 19), Hrímgerðr is bent on revenge and atonement for the death of her father Hati. Yet, bantering insults with her, Atli keeps her talking until daybreak, thus defeating her (st. 30):

Dagr er nú, Hrímgerðr enn þic dvalða hefir,
Atli til aldrlaga;
Hafnar marc þyccir hlœglict vera,
þars þú í steins líki stendr.

It is day now, Hrímgerðr and Atli has delayed you
until life's end;
a habour mark you are thought to be, a ridiculous one,
where you stand in the likeness of a stone.

Thus, like many trolls of modern Icelandic folklore, the Eddic troll who threatened death to Helgi's crew and whose mother had kept the ships from leaving the fjord ends her life by turning to stone after she has been struck by the first light of day. Interestingly, this not only ends a threat, but also creates a landmark: for the troll turns into a *hafnar mark*, a 'harbour mark,' probably a landmark indicating the harbour entrance (La Farge and Tucker 1992, 173 [s.v. 'mark']).

Looking at this passage from the perspective of the Beowulf debate, there are striking if inconclusive reminiscences: The hero confronts the troll in a watery environment and triumphs; the trolls act as a nocturnal fighting unit of mother and murderous child; and even some of the vocabulary of *Beowulf* and the Eddic poem seems to echo each other: Hrímgerðr's father is a *iǫtunn*, which etymologically is the same word as the Old English *eoten* that *Beowulf* uses to describe Grendel (La Farge and Tucker 1992, 140 [s.v. 'iǫtunn']).

In the mirroring between the trolls of *Beowulf* and those of Iceland there seem to reverberate 'prolonged echoes' (Clunies Ross 1994–1998) that are both too strong to dismiss entirely and too weak to allow any firm conclusions: Maybe there is nothing more here than the faint reflexes of the general family relationship between two Germanic literary-mythological storytelling cultures that have developed separately and independently for a very long time. The connection thus may not be closer than the one highlighted by Carolyne Larrington between the Icelandic *nykr* and "its Old English counterparts, the *nicoras*," as they are "found lazing in the sun at the edge of Grendel's Mere when Beowulf tracks the murderous water-hag, Grendel's Mother […], to her lair" (Larrington 2015, 198).

Yet even such extremely prolonged echoes, too refracted to be intelligible as they may be, have a fascination of their own – especially if they are encountered again and again and again. In this spirit, this contribution presents a survey of the watery trolls of one example of a local Icelandic storytelling culture: the Árneshreppur district of the Strandir region of the Icelandic Westfjords. To me, the lurking of the trolls in the water in narratives like *Helgaqviða Hjǫrvarðzsonar*, *Grettis saga*, and *Beowulf* has always been one of their most intriguing facets, and in the course of an ongoing project of digitally mapping the folkloric storytelling tradition of northern Strandir,[1] it turned out that such watery trolls not only occur in the three medieval narratives mentioned above, but again and again are found also in the mountains as well as along the coastline of Strandir, where an example is documented every couple of farms.

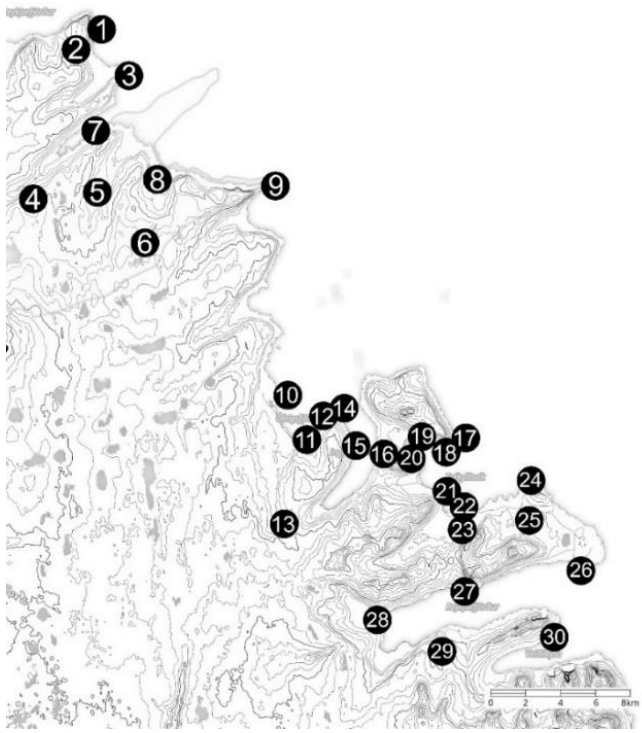
The following pages therefore will present a survey of the 'water trolls' of the northernmost *hreppur* (an administrative unit) of the project region. For the purposes of this survey, 'water trolls' shall be understood in a purely heuristic (and pragmatic) manner as trolls that in some way or another appear associated with water; this may for instance mean a coastal location, location near a watercourse or wetland area (including bogs), or a connection with a story in which water plays a role of some sort. In other words, this survey does not focus on a particular 'taxonomic' category of trolls or a specific group of motifs, but simply tries to bring together all trolls connected in some way with water. The restriction to a single *hreppur* will allow to compile a catalogue of such trolls that can aim at completeness (though the current state of research means that it will probably fail to achieve it); in doing so, it hopes to open up a new tantalising

[1] DFG-funded project (no. 495416732) "Erzählen am Ende der Zivilisation: Kartierung, Kontextualisierung und Analyse von landschaftsbezogenen Erzähltraditionen in den isländischen Westfjorden," in collaboration with Rannsóknasetur Háskóla Íslands á Ströndum – Þjóðfræðistofa and the Digital Humanities Group of LMU Munich; the digital map will in due course be accessible under https://www.strandasogur.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/.

perspective on the prolonged echoes that may or may not faintly be heard between *Beowulf* and its medieval Icelandic parallels. What actual conclusions can or cannot be drawn from this material, I will not venture to suggest; for, arising from a digital mapping project, the following in the first instance is an homage to Terry Gunnell as a digital map maker, whose *Sagnagrunnur* database has presented us with a treasure trove of material but humbly refrains from forcing any specific reading of it.

**Water Trolls in Árneshreppur, Northern Strandir: A Preliminary Map and Catalogue**

This catalogue presents a survey of folkloric troll traditions in Árneshreppur to such an extent as these troll traditions are associated with specific features of the real-world landscape and suggest an association between their trolls and water, broadly conceived. Most traditions consist in the identification of coastal rocks as petrified trolls (closely recalling Hrímgerðr's transformation into a harbour mark); such petrified trolls are often called *Kerling* ('troll woman, crone'), and in most cases, such *Kerlingar* are identified as trolls only by their name and are not connected with an explicit story. A second, smaller group consists of river gorges associated with trolls (cf. the tradition noted by *Grettis saga*, ch. 65 [Guðni Jónsson 1936, 213], according to which one of Grettir's trolls, struck by the light of day, turned to stone on the rim of the river canyon by the waterfall). Furthermore, there are some very individual cases that defy broader classification. Following the example of the *Sagnagrunnur* database, the following catalogue presents its material in the Icelandic original without translation, though it prefaces them with very short summaries in English. The catalogue is organised geographically from north to south. Entries are organised by farm and follow the structure 1) microtoponym(s) of the landscape feature(s) connected with troll lore; 2) GPS-coordinates if known; 3) short summary of the troll tradition; 4) summary or quotation of selected pertinent documentation and further references. In selected examples, this is accompanied by a photograph of the troll landscape feature in question. An overview map (Map 1) shows the approximate location of all sites that today still are identifiable. As an aside and with a view to Larrington's highlighting of the connection between *nykr* and *nicoras* (Larrington 2015, 198), it may be worth mentioning that the area also has at least two places connected with the *nykr* by name or story (Valdimar Thorarensen 1970; Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1976b, 4); these are not included in the following survey, but in Strandir as at the "mere" in *Beowulf*, watery trolls and water horses (*nykr*) seem to haunt the same shores.




Map 1. Water trolls in Árneshreppur. *Skjaldabjarnarvík*: 1) Kerlingar — 2) Tröllkonugil — 3) Kerlingar [2] — *Drangar*: 4) Tröllkonugil — 5) Meyjarvatn — 6) Húsadalsvatn — 7) Kerling [Bjarnarfjörður] — 8) Kerlingar — 9) Kerlingar [2] — *Ófeigsfjörður*: 10) Kerling v/Háareka — 11) Kerling v/Hamra 12) Kerling v/Stekkjargrund — 13) Runkufoss and Runkugil — *Seljanes*: 14) Kerling — 15) Valleyri — *Ingólfsfjörður*: 16) Grímshaugur — *Krossnes*: 17) Kerling — 18) Kvíaklettagat — 19) Berg — *Norðurfjörður*: 20) Tröllahlaði & Skuggi & Urðarstapi — *Árnes*: 21) Árnesstapar — 22) Kerling — 23) Kleppa — *Litla-Ávík*: 24) Dugguhola — 25) Mýrarhnúkur — *Gjögur*: 26) Kerling — *Naustvík*: 27) Tröllkarl — *Reykjarfjörður*: 28) Grýlusteinn — *Kjós*: 29) Kerling — *Kambur*: 30) Kerling. Base map created on *Inkatlas.com*. Copyright OpenStreetMap contributors (openstreetmap.org), Inkatlas.

## Table of Trolls

*Skjaldabjarnarvík*

| **Kerlingar** | N 66.154963° W -21.576612° and<br>N 66.154514° W -21.576180° |
|---|---|
| Two coastal rock pillars whose name designates them as petrified troll women. | |
| Nokkru innar en Bjarnarnes eru standklettar við sjó, sem nefnast Kerlingar […]. Þær (Kerlingarnar) eru tvær. Við þær eru sker og flúrur, nefndar Kerlingasker […] eða Kerlingaflúrur […]. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (a), 1.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (a), 3. | |

| **Tröllkonugil** | N 66.24964608° W -21.98073832° |
|---|---|
| The placename Tröllkonugil ('Glen of the Troll Woman') suggests a trollish inhabitant of the glen. A brook flows down the glen. | |
| Upp á Nordal eru nokkur örnefni. Í norðurhlíð dalsins er alldjúpt gil. Náttmálagil […] eða Tröllkonugil […]. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (a), 3.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (a), 3. | |

| **Kerlingar (2)** | Not identified. |
|---|---|
| A group of five coastal rocks whose name Kerlingar ('Troll Women, Crones') suggests an identification as trolls. In the stretch of coast where twentieth-century documentation locates them (see Map 1), no such group can today be unambiguously identified. | |
| Sunnan við Púfnavog er klettagirðing fyrir landi, og ber mest á fimm klettum; þrír þeirra eru í röð, en tveir aðeins innar. Þeir heita Kerlingar […], og ofan við þær er Kerlingasund […]. Það hét að fara yfir ofan eða innan við Kerlingar. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (a), 7–8.)<br><br>Cf. Eiríkur Guðmundsson 1974, 2; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (a), 6. | |

*Drangar*

| **Tröllkonugil** | N 66.179837° W -22.038146° |
|---|---|
| Tröllkonugil ('Glen of the Troll Woman') is a deep river canyon said once to have been inhabited by a troll woman who devoured the livestock of the local farmers and lived in a cave there. | |
| Sunnanvert við Bjarnarfjörð í Strandasýslu rennur gil til vesturs í Bjarnarfjarðará. Gil þetta heitir *Tröllkonugil*. Dregur það nafn af tröllkonu, er átti byggð í gilinu eða skammt þaðan. […] Jafnframt veiðskapnum tók tröllkona þessi nokkurn toll af fé nálægra bænda. […] Bændur höfðu orðið varir við byggð tröllkonunnar. Átti hún að vera í helli einum nálægt stærstu gljúfrunum í gilinu. Sagt er að hellir þessi sé nú hruninn eða týndur. […] Bændur tóku fyrst til bragðs að velta fram björgum nokkrum að helli tröllkonunnar. […] Fór svo, að tvö mikil björg lentu á hellisþakinu og brutu það. […] Tröllkonan hafði fótbrotnað, er síðara bjargið féll […]. Þegar bændur komu í hellirinn, sáu þeir brátt hvernig ástatt var. Lá tröllkonan þar steindauð á beðinum, blá og bólgin. Bændur rannsökuðu nú hellirinn nánara og fundu þar fé allmikið. Tóku þeir það til sín. Lögðu síðan eld í hellirinn og brenndu tröllkonuna að köldum kolum. (Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason 1954, 136–42.)<br><br>Cf. Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974a, 1; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (b), 3. | |

Fig. 1. In Tröllkonugil (‘Glen of the Troll Woman’) in Skjaldabjarnarvík. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 2. Tröllkonugil (‘Glen of the Troll Woman’) in Drangar. © M. Egeler.

| **Meyjarvatn** | N 66.179629° W -21.952826° |
|---|---|
| The lake Meyjarvatn was one of the hunting grounds of the troll from Tröllkonugil at Drangar (see there). | |
| Sunnanvert við Bjarnarfjörð í Strandasýslu rennur gil til vesturs í Bjarnarfjarðará. Gil þetta heitir *Tröllkonugil*. Dregur það nafn af tröllkonu, er átti byggð í gilinu eða skammt þaðan. Sagt er að tröllkona þessi hafi mest lifað af veiðiskap í nálægum vötnum, en það eru Meyjarvatn og Húsadalsvatn. (Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason 1954, 136–42, quote: 136.) | |

| **Húsadalsvatn** | Nyðra-Húsadalsvatn: N 66.157667° W -21.885844°<br>Syðra-Húsadalsvatn: N 66.143328° W -21.900763°<br>(identification according to Haukur Jóhannesson 2000, 107) |
|---|---|
| The lake Húsadalsvatn was one of the hunting grounds of the troll from Tröllkonugil at Drangar (see there). | |
| See Meyjarvatn above. | |

| **Kerling (Bjarnarfjörður in Drangar)** | N 66.20842868° W -21.95361478° |
|---|---|
| A coastal rock. | |
| Utan við [Breiða]nesin er klettur í sjó, sem heitir Kerling […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974a, 1–2.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (b), 3. | |

| **Kerling (2)** | Not identified. |
|---|---|
| A rock pillars which can no longer be identified. | |
| […] einn sérstakur standklettur, sem kallast Kerling […]. (Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (b), 8.) | |

| **Kerlingar** | N 66.18516538° W -21.87779375° |
|---|---|
| Two rocks not far from the river and a hot spring with a bathing pool. | |
| Kerlingaholt […] er talsvert langt neðan við Daleyrar. Það nær fast að ánni. Á því eru tvær mannhæðarháar klettastrýtur, kallaðar Kerlingar […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974a, 11.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (b), 9, 16. | |

| **Kerlingar (2)** | N 66.182272° W -21.739756° (approximately) |
|---|---|
| Four offshore rocks. | |
| Kerlingar […] eru fjórir klettar beint fram undan Geltinum. Þær standa allar upp úr um stórstraumsfjöru, en farið var stundum á litlum bátum ofan við þær, ef hvasst var á vestri. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974a, 8.) | |

Fig. 3. Kerling in Bjarnarfjörður in Drangar. © M. Egeler.

*Ófeigsfjörður*

| **Kerling (= Kerling v/Háareka)** | N 66.076594° W -21.725011° |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock. | |
| Kerling […] heitir sker sem er rétt utan við klappirnar er liggja að Saxavogi sunnanverðum. Stór uppmjór klettur er á skerinu og til að sjá ekki ólíkur sitjandi manni. (Haukur Jóhannesson 1988, 49.)<br><br>Cf. Anonymous s.a., 5; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (c), 3; Pétur Guðmundsson and Guðmundur Guðmundsson s.a., 20. | |

| **Kerling (= innri Kerling = Kerling v/Hamra)** | N 66.053803° W -21.682636° |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock. | |
| Fjaran er þarna víðast klappir, stórir steinar og möl inn að alláberandi klettatanga. Fremri hluti hans er fráskilinn klettahólmi sem fjarar út í. Hann heitir Kerling […]. (Haukur Jóhannesson 1988, 9.)<br><br>Cf. Anonymous s.a., 1; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (c), 9; Pétur Guðmundsson and Guðmundur Guðmundsson s.a., 4. | |

| **Kerling (v/Stekkjargrund)** | N 66.057094° W -21.677209° |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock. | |
| „Kerling“ heitir smá klettahólmi rétt innan við nefnda grund [= Stekkjargrund]. […] Aðeins innan við Kerlingu gengur allbrött aurskriða úr Bökkunum niður í fjöru. (Pétur Guðmundsson and Guðmundur Guðmundsson s.a., 4.)<br><br>Cf. Haukur Jóhannesson 1988, 8; Anonymous s.a., 1. | |

| **Runkufoss and Runkugil** | N 66.005779° W -21.719152° |
|---|---|
| A canyon and its waterfall named with a troll name. | |
| Upp úr Húsárdalsbotni, til suðausturs, er ekki eins há og brött brekka, eins og upp með Lýsislæk. Þegar þarna er farið er farið upp brekkuna skammt norðaustan Húsár, er rennur þarna í djúpu gili frá suðaustri. Gilið er kallað […] „Runkugil.“ Ofarlega í gilinu er […] „Runkufoss.“ Bæði nöfnin sennilega forn og dregin af tröllkonu- eða Gríluheiti. (Pétur Guðmundsson and Guðmundur Guðmundsson s.a., 11, 12.)<br><br>Cf. Haukur Jóhannesson 1988, 27–28; Anonymous s.a., 3; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (c), 6. | |

Fig. 4. Runkufoss and Runkugil. © M. Egeler.

*Seljanes*

| **Kerling** | N 66.065113° W -21.656342° |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock by the farm's boat landing place. | |
| Lending […] er vík rétt innan við nesið, niður af túni. Út af henni er kollóttur klettur, nefndur Kerling […]. Ekkert mannslag er á henni. (Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979a, 3.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (d), 2. | |

| **Valleyri** | N 66.04694962° W -21.62883848° |
|---|---|
| A peninsula with a pond in which a troll treasure is said to be hidden. | |
| Valleyri […] tekur við innan við Byrgisgrundir. Bæði þar og á Byrgisgrundunum eru grónar grundir. Smátjörn er á Valleyrinni. Sögn er um, að Grímur sá, sem á að vera heygður í Grímshaugi í Eyrarlandi hinum megin við fjörðinn, hafi fólgið skip sitt í tjörninni. Sagt er, að bærinn á Eyri hafi sýnzt brenna, þegar reynt hefur verið að ná því. (Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979a, 4.) | |

Munnmæli: Grímur tröll gróf skip sitt á Valleyri í Seljanesslandi, beint á móti Grímshaug. Var skipið hlaðið gulli og gersemum. Lét hann svo um mæla að þeir menn skyldu farast, sem græfu eftir skipinu. Á þetta að hafa borið við nokkrum sinnum. Á Valleyri er stór laut, og þar á skipið að vera grafið. (Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1966, 2.)

Cf. Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974c, 4–5; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (d), 2.

*Ingólfsfjörður*

| **Kerlingar** | Not identified. |
|---|---|
| Coastal rocks, probably destroyed by road construction. | |
| Næsta nes heitir Kattarnes […]. Á því eru tveir klettastandar, sem heita Kerlingar […]. Sagan segir, að það væru kerlingar í álögum, sem ætluðu að vaða yfir að Eyri, en dagaði þarna uppi. Ekki sést nein mannsmynd á þeim. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974b, 5.)<br><br>Cf. Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (b), 6; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (e), 3. | |

| **Grímshaugur** | N 66.04714087° W -21.59397947° |
|---|---|
| A hill in which the troll Grímur is said to be buried who hid the treasure at Valleyri. From his burial mound, Grímur protects the fjord against evil spirits. | |
| Nokkru utar gengur allstórt gróið nes fram í sjó. Það heitir Grímsnes […], kennt við Grím tröllkarl, sem á að vera heygður í stórum sandhaugi, er kallaður er Grímshaugur […]. Hins vegar á Grímur að hafa grafið skip sitt í stóra laut í Valleyri í Seljaneslandi, beint á móti Grímsnesi. Skipið var hlaðið gulli og gersemum. Illa hefur gengið, þegar menn hafa reynt að grafa eftir skipinu, því að ýmis óhöpp hafa þá borið að höndum. Grímur tröll á að sjá um, að engin illvættur komist inn á fjörðinn. Á Grímsnesi voru beitarhús. Utan við Grímsnes er vík, sem heitir Grímsnesvík […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974c, 4–5.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1966, 2; Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (c), 11; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (f), 3. On the burial mound of Grímur's wife Eirný, see Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (f), 3; Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1966, 1; Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (c), 6. | |

*Krossnes*

| **Kerling** | N 66.048768° W -21.496519° (approx.) |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock. | |
| Á rifinu utan til við Balann er klettadrangur, er nefnist Kerling […]. Þegar róið var út frá Krossnesi fór Kerlingin út en Pétur [another coastal rock] í land en er lengra fram var komið snerist þetta við. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (d), 6.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1965, 1, 3; Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979b, 3. | |

Fig. 5. Kerling in Seljanes. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 6. Kerling in Krossnes. © M. Egeler.

| **Kvíaklettagat (= Spor)** | N 66.04629400° W -21.50680507° |
|---|---|
| A gap in a rock formation created by a kick from a troll. This gap served as a landmark for orientation at sea (*fiskimið*). | |
| Kvíaklettagat […] í Kvíaklettum […] er líka nefnt Spor […]. Tröllkona var að koma af tröllafundi norðan af Hornbjargi, klofaði þarna yfir og gatið er spor hennar. Hana dagaði uppi í Urðunum […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1991.)<br><br>Upp af Egilsgjótu er gat í gegnum Kvíaklettana, Kvíaklettagat […]. Það var áður haft fyrir fiskimið.<br>(Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979b, 6.)<br><br>Cf. Haukur Jóhannesson 2000, 83; s.a. (e), 8. | |

| **Berg** | N 66.049247° W -21.537814° |
|---|---|
| The bridgehead of a bridge that trolls tried to build across the fjord. | |
| Næst tekur við Ytri-Bergisvík […] og innan við hana er þverhníptur klettur, er nefnist Berg […]. Í Berginu er bríkk sem nefnist Bryggja […] og gegnt henni sunnan við Norðurfjörð er önnur bríkk, Tröllahlaði. Sagt er, að tröll hafi ætlað að hlaða fyrir fjörðinn milli Tröllahlaða og Bergsins en dagað uppi við verkið. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (f), 8.)<br><br>Arinbjörn Bernharðsson (2023) also identified one of the trolls of the troll bridge building work gang in the rock pillars that are located just off Berg.<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1965, 1, 3; Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979b, 6; Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (e), 10; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (g), 4. | |

*Norðurfjörður*

| **Tröllahlaði** | N 66.040445° W -21.5458933333° |
|---|---|
| The bridgehead of the unfinished troll bridge on the southern side of the fjord. | |
| Nokkru innar en Skuggi er klettabrík, sem gengur í sjó fram. Hún er líkt og hlaðin. Hún heitir Tröllahlaði […]. Um hana er eftirfarandi þjóðsaga: Tröll nokkurt ætlaði að hlaða þvert yfir Norðurfjörð í Berg á Krossnesi, en dagaði uppi. Steinvör segir, að það hafi orðið að klettinum Skugga. Tröll þetta átti að eiga heima í Urðartindi. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (g), 2.)<br><br>Cf. Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1976a, 2; Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (f), 8; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (h), 6; Símon Jóh. Ágústsson s.a. (a), 1; s.a. (b), 2. | |

| **Skuggi** | N 66.038561° W -21.543272° |
|---|---|
| Coastal rock. | |
| Landamerki milli Mela og Norðurfjarðar eru um klett, sem Skuggi […] hét. Hann stóð yzt í Nesvík […], sem að mestu er í Melalandi. Kletturinn er nú hruninn, en var út í sjó, nema um fjörur. Hann var um 2ja metra hár, en er nú hruninn fyrir allnokkru. […] Tröll nokkurt ætlaði að hlaða þvert yfir Norðurfjörð í Berg á Krossnesi, en dagaði uppi. Steinvör segir, að það hafi orðið að klettinum Skugga. Tröll þetta átti að eiga heima í Urðartindi. (Haukur Jóhannesson s.a. (g), 1, 2.)<br><br>Cf. Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1976a, 1; 1976b, 8; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (h), 6; Símon Jóh. Ágústsson s.a. (a), 1; s.a. (b), 2. | |

Fig. 7. Kvíaklettagat (= Spor), seen from sea. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 8. Berg in Krossnes. © M. Egeler.

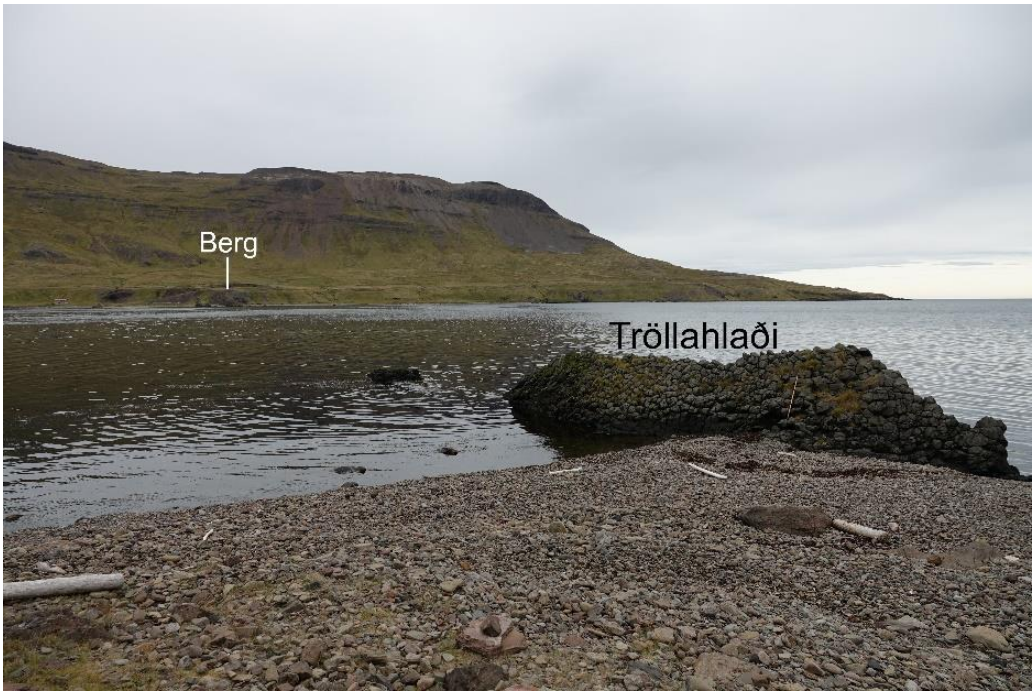



Fig. 9. Tröllahlaði in Norðurfjörður. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 10. Urðarstapi and Skuggi. © M. Egeler.

| **Urðarstapi (= Stapinn)** | N 66.037745° W -21.5425683333° |
|---|---|
| Coastal rock pillar. | |
| Norðurfjarðar megin við Urðarnesið er klettastapi nokkuð hár niður við sjó. Hann heitir Urðarstapi […]. (Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1976b, 8.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (i), 1.<br><br>Arinbjörn Bernharðsson (2023) identified Stapinn as a troll who worked on the bridge construction and was overtaken by the sun. | |

*Árnes*

| **Árnesstapar (= Stapar = Karl og Kerling)** | N 66.020727° W -21.516595° |
|---|---|
| Three coastal rocks identified as two trolls and one of their farm animals. | |
| Tröllkarl og kerling bjuggu í Hornbjargi. Þau fóru á stjá eitthvað austur eftir. Þegar þau voru á leið til baka með kú, þá fór svo að nóttin varð eitthvað styttri en þau reiknuðu með. […] Skötuhjúin tóku nú til fótanna og stukku yfir Trékyllisvík og undir Árnestinda, en þá kom sólin upp og urðu þau að steini þar sem nú eru Árnesstapar. (Haukur Jóhannesson 2000, 83.)<br><br>Cf. *Tíminn Sunnudagsblað* 26 March 1967, 242, https://timarit.is/page/3555926; Haukur Jóhannesson 1989, 1, 2000, 83–84; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (j), 2–3 = [Jóhann Hjaltason] s.a. (k), 1. | |

Fig. 11. Árnesstapar. © M. Egeler.

| **Kerlingarsker (= Kerling)** | N 66.015745° W -21.502306° (approximately) |
|---|---|
| An offshore rock. | |
| Beint fram af Oddanum er klakklaga sker sem heitir Kerling […] eða Kerlingarsker […]. (Haukur Jóhannesson 1989, 3.)<br><br>Cf. Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (j), 6 = [Jóhann Hjaltason] s.a. (k), 2. | |

| **Kleppa** | N 66.0065333333° W -21.4920083333° |
|---|---|
| Rocky hill in a boggy area. Under the rock, the eponymous troll woman Kleppa is said to be buried who created the bogland by pissing there. | |
| Framarlega í mýrunum, efri hluta þeirra, er stór grjóthóll upp úr mýrlendinu, Kleppa […]. Sú munnmælasögn fylgir Kleppu, að tröllkerling sú sem áður er getið, gerði Finnboga ramma það til bekknis að míga í mýrarnar með þeim ummælum að þær skuldu ávalt blautar verða. Sat kerling við þessa iðju sína einn morgun er Finnbogi reis úr rekkju. Varð honum þá skapfátt við kerlu. Snaraðist upp á fjallsbrún og spyrnti þar við fæti með því afli, að fylla sprakk fram úr fjallinu og staðnæmdist ekki fyrr en niðri í mýrum þar sem kerling sat að iðju sinni. Varð hún þar undir og dregur hraunhnúkurinn Kleppa nafn sitt af tröllkonunni. (Guðmundur P. Valgeirsson 1979, 7–8.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1964a, 2; s.a. (c); Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1979c, 6; Pálína Þórólfsdóttir 1980, 4; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (l), 4. | |

*Litla-Ávík*

| **Dugguhola** | N 66.02740963° W -21.40935740° |
|---|---|
| A coastal cave through which a troll woman is said to have threaded her fishing line into the sea through a tunnel from the hill Mýrarhnúkur. | |
| Mýrarhnúkur og Dugguhola: […] Undir [Mýrarhnúks]þúfunni á að vera gat og göng sem liggja undir Reykjaneshyrnu og opnast út í Dugguholu. Dugguhola er hellir í klettanesi nokkru fyrir austan Litlu-Ávík og sést ekki inn í botn á honum. Sagan segir að tröllkona ein hafi veitt niður í gegnum gatið undir Mýrarhnúksþúfunni. (Haukur Jóhannesson 2000, 72.)<br><br>Cf. Pálína Þórólfsdóttir and Þórólfur Guðfinnsson 1975, 1; Haukur Jóhannesson and Helgi Jónsson 2007, 18; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (m), 2. | |

| **Mýrarhnúksþúfa** | N 66.00997598° W -21.40747793° |
|---|---|
| A tussock on the highest point of a hill said to be connected to the sea by a tunnel through which a troll woman used to fish (see Duggahola above). | |
| Suðvestan við Hyrnuna er stakt ílangt fell, Mýrarhnúkur með Mýrarhnúksþúfu. Norðan undir hnúknum er Mýrarhnúksvatn. Mýrarhnúkur og Dugguhola: Að baki Reykjaneshyrnu er lítið aflangt fell sem Mýrarhnúkur nefnist og efst á því er svonefnd Mýrarhnúksþúfa. Undir þúfunni á að vera gat og göng sem liggja undir Reykjaneshyrnu og opnast út í Dugguholu. […] Sagan segir að tröllkona ein hafi veitt niður í gegnum gatið undir Mýrarhnúksþúfunni. Önnur saga segir að göng séu úr þúfunni í svonefnt Kattarvatn […] og hafi köttur átt að hafa farið þar í gegn. (Haukur Jóhannesson 2000, 72.)<br><br>Cf. Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974d, 1, 4; Pálína Þórólfsdóttir and Þórólfur Guðfinnsson 1975, 2; Haukur Jóhannesson and Helgi Jónsson 2007, 18; Jóhann Hjaltason s.a. (m), 3. | |

Fig. 12. Dugguhola in Litla-Ávík. © M. Egeler.

*Gjögur*

| **Kerling** | N 65.986752° W -21.345583° (approximately) |
|---|---|
| Offshore rock. Kerling collapsed during a storm in the 1990s; today, no trace of this rock is visible, nor could its exact former location be determined. | |
| Kerling […] er stór flatur steinn, sem stendur alltaf upp úr sjó […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974e, 2.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1969, 1. | |

*Naustvík*

| **Tröllkarl (= Karl)** | N 65.97234877° W -21.48644868° |
|---|---|
| Coastal rock pillar said to be a male petrified troll who looks over the fjord to the female petrified troll Kerling in Kjós. There is a direct line of sight between them. | |
| Tröllkarl […] heitir stór klettur neðan við Sætrakleifina. Á honum var greinileg mannsmynd, en nú er hausinn farinn af honum. (Guðrún S. Magnúsdóttir 1976c, 1–2.)<br><br>Kerling […] nefndist drangur uppi á Langahjalla […] Karl nefndist drangur í Sætrakleif hinum megin við fjörðinn. Þau átti að hafa dagað uppi. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974f, 15.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1964c, 2; 1964b, 1. | |

Fig. 13. Tröllkarl in Naustvík. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 14. Grýlusteinn in Reykjarfjörður. © M. Egeler.

*Reykjarfjörður*

| **Grýlusteinn** | N 65.95652988° W -21.60820385° (closest point on land to the stone) |
|---|---|
| Offshore rock said to be inhabited by Grýla. | |
| Sunnarlega á Reykjarfjarðarsandi er nokkuð stór steinn í fjörunni, fjarar uppi í stórstraumsfjöru. Hann heitir Grýlusteinn […]. Þar var börnum sagt, að Grýla byggi. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974g, 2.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1964d, 1. | |

*Kjós*

| **Kerling** | N 65.94476277° W -21.52082783° |
|---|---|
| Rock pillar located where a river breaks through a cliff wall. | |
| Í miðri ánni, rétt niður við sjó, er standklettur, kallaður Kerling […]. Þetta er sögð vera tröllkerling, sem dagað hefur uppi. Ekkert mannsmót er á henni. […]. Kerling […] nefndist drangur uppi á Langahjalla […], í Kleifaránni […] eða alveg við hana. Lítill drangur niðri við sjó, sem nefndur er Kerling í skránni, var nafnlaus. Karl nefndist drangur í Sætrakleif hinum megin við fjörðinn. Þau átti að hafa dagað uppi. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974f, 4, 15.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1964c, 2. | |

| **Kerlingarklif (= Kerlingarklof = Klif)** | Not identified. |
|---|---|
| Canyon onomastically associated with a troll woman. | |
| Önnur gjá nafnlaus er nær Miðdegisgili. [neðanmálsgrein: 1) Guðmundur Ágústsson […] telur, að hún hafi verið kölluð Klif […] eða Kerlingarklif […].] Síldarfólk kallaði hana Kerlingarklof […]. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974f, 7.)<br><br>Cf. Símon Jóh. Ágústsson 1964c, 3; Eyjólfur Valgeirsson and Sigurbjörg Alexandersdóttir 1965, 2. | |

*Kambur*

| **Kerling** | N 65.951583° W -21.37776° (approximately) |
|---|---|
| Offshore rock. A second, male troll (*Karl*) has collapsed in a storm. | |
| Á mótum Rekaparts og Húsabakka er klettastandur, sem kallast Kerling […]. Áður voru standarnir tveir, hinn hét Karl […] og var klofinn að neðan. Hann hrundi í stórbrimi rétt fyrir 1930. (Guðrún Magnúsdóttir 1974h, 3–4.) | |

Fig. 15. Kerling in Kjós. © M. Egeler.

Fig. 16. Kerling in Kambur. © M. Egeler.

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# ÓKINDARKVÆÐI: B-GERÐ

Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir*

Afmælisbarnið hlýtur nú að vera orðið nokkuð þreytt á því að ég skrifi um Grýlu, og það til viðbótar þeim ritum sem það hefur sjálft sett saman um hana (Terry Gunnell 2001; 2007). Ég bankaði því að þessu sinni upp á hjá grannkonu hennar, Ókindinni.

**Inngangur: Jón Samsonarson um Ókindina**

Ókindin er trúlega yngri en Grýla, skrímslið sem kemur að bæjum á veturna og sækist eftir óþekkum börnum í pottinn sinn. Um Grýlu var mikið kveðið á 17.–18. öld. Hvað Ókindina varðar þá færir Jón Samsonarson (1998) rök fyrir því að Björg Pétursdóttir (1749–1839) frá Ketilsstöðum á Völlum sem bjó á Kirkjubæ í Hróarstungu hafi ort Ókindarkvæði handa dóttur sinni Sigríði. Sigríður var fædd 1797 (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 5:216), kvæðið var því væntanlega samið um eða upp úr 1800. Jón Samsonarson segir reyndar: „Um Ókindina í Ókindarkvæði er óvíst hvort höfundur kvæðisins býr hana til sem vel má vera eða hún hefur verið fyrir í vitund barna og uppalenda fyrir austan […]“ (1998, 28). Jón leiðir þó líkum að því að vinsælt Grýlukvæði eftir Stefán Ólafsson í Vallanesi, ættföður Bjargar, hafi verið fyrirmynd Ókindarkvæðis og jafnframt kveikjan að hugmyndinni um Ókindina (1998, 29); Jón nefnir ekki í þessu samhengi Grýlukvæði Guðmundar Erlendssonar, einnig vinsælt barnakvæði. Þá er í grein Jóns samanburður á barnafælunum Grýlu og Ókindinni ásamt hugleiðingum um uppeldisboðskap kvæða sem eru kennd við þær (1998, einkum 28–29).

Í grein sinni prentar Jón tvo texta Ókindarkvæðis. Á bls. 26–27 er uppskrift Gísla Brynjólfssonar (yngri) í NKS 3315 II 4to (hér eftir 3315) eftir móður sinni Guðrúnu, dóttur Stefáns amtmanns Þórarinssonar, frá Möðruvöllum í Hörgárdal. Á bls. 31–32 er uppskrift Sigríðar Steinbjörnsdóttur frá 5. mars 1984 eftir Sigríði Lárusdóttur Gíslasonar (f. 1862) frá Neðri-Mýrum í Refasveit. Trúlega er það Sigríður Ólína Anna Lucinda

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Lárusdóttir (1908–1996), húsfreyja á Kornsá (Guðmundur Sigurður Jóhannsson, Magnús Björnsson 1999, 3:973–74, 4:1274). Úr uppskrift Sigríðar, sem Jón Samsonarson segir vera „í handriti í Stofnun Árna Magnússonar“ (sem ég hef því miður ekki enn getað staðsett nánar), er kvæðið birt frá 6. erindi til loka.

Uppskrift Sigríðar Steinbjörnsdóttur heitir hjá Jóni Samsonarsyni „Þriðja gerð Ókindarkvæðis“ (1998, 31). Af umfjöllun Jóns er ljóst að hinar tvær gerðirnar eru uppskrift Gísla Brynjólfssonar í 3315, sem Jón telur vera „upphafleg[a …] gerð kvæðisins“ eða a.m.k. standa næst því sem Björg kvað (1998, 32), og texti Ókindarkvæðis sem Ólafur Davíðsson birti í *Íslenzkum gátum, skemtunum, vikivökum og þulum* (Jón Árnason, Ólafur Davíðsson 1887–1903, 4:171; hér eftir *ÍGSVÞ*) án höfundarnafns eða heimildar. Ástæða þess að Jón Samsonarson telur textann í *ÍGSVÞ* vera sérstaka gerð virðist vera sú að þar eru ekki höfð með tvö öftustu erindin sem eru í 3315 – frekar en að því hafi ráðið smávægilegur orðamunur sem Jón tínir til (1998, 30–31). Til samanburðar má nefna uppskrift séra Friðriks Eggerz í Lbs 936 4to, bls. 790–91 (Jón Samsonarson 1998, 30; hér eftir 936) sem er augljóslega skyld bæði textanum í 3315 og *ÍGSVÞ*; þar er ákveðinn orðamunur sem Jón Samsonarson (1998) lætur liggja milli hluta. Mest munar um *augað snart blátt* í 5. erindi (936) vs. *augað blátt* (3315 og *ÍGSVÞ*), en fleira smávægilegt má tína til. Ef rétt er að Jón hafi látið tvö öftustu erindin greina á milli mismunandi gerða kvæðisins, eins og hér er getið til um, þá tilheyrir uppskriftin í 936 sömu gerð og 3315, en erindin tvö eru til staðar í báðum handritunum.

Eftir grein Jóns Samsonarsonar (1998) að dæma hafði hann aðeins vitneskju um þessa fjóra texta kvæðisins sem höfðu textagildi: 3315, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 og uppskrift Sigríðar Steinbjörnsdóttur. Aldarfjórðungi síðar eru þekktir hátt í tuttugu slíkir textar í handritum[1] og jafnframt um fimmtíu textar á hljóðupptökum á Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum (sem verða þó aðeins lítillega skoðaðir að þessu sinni). Nú er ljóst að tilbrigði sem safnast hafa saman í þessum textum eru fleiri en svo að aðeins erindafjöldi – þrátt fyrir augljóst mikilvægi hans – greini á milli mismunandi gerða kvæðisins.

## Ókindin í Lbs 537 4to og Lbs 587 4to VI

Ein af elstu uppskriftum Ókindarkvæðis er í Lbs 537 4to (238v; hér eftir 537), en Jón Samsonarson (1998) nefnir hana ekki. Handritið er tímasett til 1850–1865 á Handrit.is. Þar segir að Ókindarkvæði sé í tvinni frá Jóni Ólafssyni frá Kolfreyjustað, ritstjóra og alþingismanni (1850–1916). Tvinnið er í stærra broti en blöðin í kringum, einkum á hæð, og er brotið upp á neðri u.þ.b. þriðjung þess. Fremst í tvinninu (238r–238v) er ævintýri af Horngarði og kímnisagan *Presturinn sem skeit í kjeraldið*, en aftast er saga af hinum skyggna Brynjólfi lækni á Brekku (239v). Sögurnar eru prentaðar eftir tvinninu í 537 í *Íslenzkum þjóðsögum og ævintýrum* (Jón Árnason et al. 1954–1961, 5:274–76, 377, sbr. 493, 498; 3:436–37, sbr. 647).

[1] Auk 3315, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 og uppskriftar Sigríðar Steinbjörnsdóttur er um að ræða handritin: Lbs 537 4to og Lbs 587 4to VI (sjá kafla 2); svokölluð RSt, ESig og ÁTh (sjá kafla 3); SÁM 30a og SÁM 30b; ÞÞ 6412, ÞÞ 6458, ÞÞ 6463, ÞÞ 6542, ÞÞ 6905, ÞÞ 6919, ÞÞ 7053 og ÞÞ 7329.

Neðsta hluta af 238v (tæplega þriðjungi) er skipt í þrjá dálka. Aftasti dálkurinn hefur fyrirsögnina *Vísa kveðin við börn*, en þar eru í raun þrjár svokallaðar bolavísur. Tveir fremri dálkarnir eru saman um fyrirsögnina *Barnið í dalnum*, en texti Ókindarkvæðis er þar á þessa leið (með léttsamræmdri stafsetningu):

**Barnið í dalnum.**
Barnið í dalnum það datt /onum gat \
:|: en fyrir neðan ókindin :|: sat
En fyrir neðan sat ókindin ljót
:|: náði hún því naumlega neðan í þess :|: /fót \
Náði hún því naumlega neða[n í] það barn
:|: hún dróg það út úr bænum og dustaði við :|: /hjarn \
Hún dróg það út úr bænum og /dustaði við fönn \
:|: Ætla jeg að úr því hryti ein lítil :|: /tönn \
Ætla jeg að úr því hryti augað blátt
:|: ókindin lamdi það allt fram á :|: /nátt \
Ókindin lamdi það í þeim stað
:|: þar til um síðir að þar kom maður :|: /að \
Þar til um síðir að þar /kom maður einn \
:|: upp tók sá barnið og ei var hann :|: /seinn \
Upp tók hann barnið [o]g inn í /bæinn vei[k] \
:|: en ókindin hafði sig [h]raða[st í] :|: /kreik \
En ókindin hafði sig ofan í fljót
:|: Barnið aflagði sín brekin mjög :|: /ljót \

Ókindarkvæði í 537 er mun styttra en í flestum heimildum, en í miðjuna vantar sem svarar þremur erindum. Sé miðað við *ÍGSVÞ*, þar sem erindin eru tölusett og ekkert misræmi er við aðrar ofangreindar heimildir varðandi tölu og röð erindanna, vantar í 537 seinni hluta 5. erindis (frá og með *Hún kallaði með kæti* í *ÍGSVÞ*) til og með fyrri hluta 8. er. (*Maklegast væri / eg mínkaði þinn þrótt*). Svo vel vildi til að aðeins þurfti að hagræða lítillega rímorðinu í seinni hluta 8. er. – *nótt* > *nátt* – til þess að það rími við fyrri hluta 5. er.: *blátt : nátt*. Samskeytin eru því óaðfinnanleg. Í 6.–7. er. og fyrri hluta 8. er. er öll bein ræða Ókindarinnar, þannig að í 537 er barninu misþyrmt þegjandi og hljóðalaust – sem vekur e.t.v. enn meiri óhug þar sem barnið í kvæðinu veit væntanlega ekki einu sinni hvers vegna það er lamið af slíku offorsi. Lesandi fréttir undir lok kvæðisins að barnið *aflagði sín brekin mjög ljót*, en þó er öldungis óvíst hvort það hafi áttað sig á mikilvægi þess að bæta ráð sitt – eða sé e.t.v. svo skelfingu lostið að það fari nú með veggjum og láti lítið fyrir sér fara.

Textaeyðan í 537 er staðsett við dálkaskil þar sem kvæðatextanum er skipt milli fyrsta og annars dálks frá vinstri. Eyðan er tæplega þriðjungur kvæðisins. Dálkarnir eru einmitt þrír í 537 og fyrirsögnin *Barnið í dalnum* er á miðri línunni, en af því má álykta að skrifari hafi gert ráð fyrir því að fylla dálkana þrjá með texta kvæðisins eingöngu. Mögulega hugðist hann skrifa kvæðið eftir handriti þar sem því var skipt í þrjá dálka

(og ég hef þá enn ekki fundið). Þegar kvæðið reyndist svo vera styttra virðist skrifari hafa lengt upp strikið, sem aðgreinir annan og þriðja dálk, svo að það næði upp í fyrirsagnarlínu, skrifað aðra fyrirsögn í þriðja dálkinn og fyllt hann með barnavísum.[2]

Þá vantar í kvæðið í 537 seinna erindið af öftustu tveimur. Slíkt er sjaldgæft og kom ekki fyrir í þeim heimildum kvæðisins sem Jón Samsonarson lýsti (1998). Þessi uppskrift kvæðisins tilheyrir því fjórðu gerð þess ef fetuð er slóð Jóns. Erindið sem vantar geymir venjulega bæði nafn kvæðisins og barnsins sem kveðið er til – enda skrifar Jón Ólafsson kvæðið án höfundarnafns, heimildar eða kvæðaheitis (hann notar fyrsta vísuorðið sem fyrirsögn). Slíkt er harla óvenjulegt fyrir 19. aldar heimildir Ókindarkvæðis, en fyrirsögnin *Ókindarkvæði* er í öllum öðrum heimildum frá þeim tíma sem vitað er um: 3315, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 („Þula rect[i]us Okindarkvæði“).[3]

Fyrirsögnin *Ókindarkvæði* er líka í Lbs 587 4to VI (14r–14v; hér eftir *587*). Þar er tvinn með uppskrift á Dúðadurtskvæði (13r–13v), Ókindarkvæði („Ókindar Kvæði“, 14r–14v) og tveimur vísum án heimildavísana eða skýringa (14v), og virðist allt vera með hendi Jóns Árnasonar. Lítill munur er á uppskrift Ókindarkvæðis í 587 og útgáfu á kvæðinu í *ÍGSVÞ* (ef hástafir og lágstafir eru látnir liggja milli hluta, sem og greinarmerki og orðabil) að því frátöldu að tvö öftustu erindin eru í 587 en ekki í *ÍGSVÞ*.[4] En eitt afar sjaldgæft tilbrigði eiga þessir tveir textar sameiginlegt: *ælítil tönn* (þ.e. eilítil, örlítil) í 4. erindi (vs. *ein lítil tönn* í 3315, 936, 537 og flestum þekktum heimildum).[5] Ólafur Davíðsson þekkti vel þjóðkvæðasafn Jóns Árnasonar þar sem þeir frændur höfðu samstarf við útgáfu á þjóðkvæðum, og því er ekki ósennilegt að hér sé komið handritið sem Ókindarkvæði var prentað eftir í *ÍGSVÞ* og Jón Samsonarson lýsti síðar eftir (1998, 23).[6] Það að tvö öftustu erindin í uppskrift Jóns Árnasonar eru ekki í *ÍGSVÞ* getur skýrst af því að einmitt þessi tvö erindi eru á bakhlið blaðsins með kvæðinu í 587 (14v). Einföld yfirsjón getur skýrt fjarvist beggja erindanna í útgáfu Ólafs. Því er ekki víst að hún tilheyri annarri gerð en uppskrift Jóns Árnasonar í 587, einkum með tilliti til þess hversu lítill munur er annars á milli textanna tveggja og til þess sjaldgæfa tilbrigðis sem þeir eiga sameiginlegt.

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[2] Sams konar eyða er í tveimur öðrum handritum, í SÁM 30a (457r–458r), uppskrift Hjalta Jónssonar í Hólum í Hornafirði, og SÁM 30b (404r–404v), uppskrift Hallfreðar Arnar Eiríkssonar eftir handriti Hjalta; smávægilegur munur er á þessum textum. Í SÁM 30a og SÁM 30b er þó seinni hluti 5. er. til staðar („Hún kvað við af kæti og kallaði hátt“) en 6.–9. er. vantar (einu fleira en í 537). 10. er. hefst á endurómi seinni hluta 5. er. en heldur síðar áfram: „Hún kvað við af kæti<.> Þá kom þar maður einn.“ Samskeytin eru í miðri línu og eru líka óaðfinnanleg. Sjá kafla 4 um sams konar eyðu í texta á hljóðupptöku.

[3] Í *Íslenzkum þjóðlögum* (Bjarni Þorsteinsson 1906–1909, 509) er fyrirsögnin við Ókindarkvæði vissulega „Það var barn í dalnum“, en þó er skýrt tekið fram: „Kvæðið heitir Ókindarkvæði.“

[4] Á eftir kvæðinu í 587 eru tvær skýringar: „x Dalnum ɔ : Fljóts dal“ og „Fljót ɔ : Lagarfljót.“

[5] Sbr. *ofurlítil tönn* í SÁM 30b (þó *ein lítil tönn* í SÁM 30a) og *örlítil tönn* í kveri í eigu Vésteins Ólasonar sem betur verður greint frá í kafla 3.

[6] Hitt er ekki heldur útilokað að kvæðið sé prentað eftir minni Ólafs Davíðssonar; Ólafur er heimildarmaður Bjarna Þorsteinssonar (1906–1909, 509) fyrir laginu við Ókindarkvæði og kunni trúlega einnig texta þess.

**B-gerð Ókindarkvæðis**

Ókindarkvæði í 537 hefur aftur á móti nokkur textabrigði sem greina það bæði frá texta þess í 3315 og í 587/*ÍGSVÞ*. Sum þeirra verða algeng í seinni tíma handritum, en önnur eru sérstök. Strax í fyrstu línu kvæðisins eru tvö tilbrigði, hvort af sínu tagi. Tilbrigðið *ofan um* gat, ritað „onum“ í 537 (vs. *ofan í* 3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ* og 936) verður tiltölulega algengt í seinni tíma handritum.[7] Upphafið *Barnið í dalnum* (vs. *Það var barn í dalnum* 3315, *ÍGSVÞ* og 936, sbr. 587) er hins vegar aðeins í örfáum handritum til viðbótar (og fer þar saman við *ofan um* en ekki *ofan í*). Hér verður sagt frá þessum handritum.

Í fyrsta lagi er kver í eigu Vésteins Ólasonar skrifað með hendi Guðmundar Árnasonar (1871–1966), afa Vésteins, eftir Ragnhildi Stefánsdóttur á Gilsá (1848–1941), tengdamóður Guðmundar og langömmu Vésteins.[8] Uppskriftin var gerð í janúar 1939, eins og fram kemur á titilsíðu kversins. Ragnhildur var fædd í Stakkahlíð í Loðmundarfirði og gift Páli Benediktssyni (1850–1919), bónda á Gilsá (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 4:109). Björg Pétursdóttir (1749–1839), sem orti Ókindarkvæði eins og Jón Samsonarson (1998) hefur sýnt fram á, var langamma Páls Benediktssonar, og því má halda fram að Ragnhildur sé nákomin kvæðinu. Handritið sem var skrifað eftir Ragnhildi verður táknað hér með upphafsstöfum hennar, RSt, en kvæðið er á bls. 11–12 í kverinu.

Annað handrit er í vörslu Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum. Það er uppskrift Elísabetar Sigurðardóttur (1894–1986) frá Bóndastöðum (hér eftir ESig). Uppskriftin er á 18 vélrituðum blöðum í bleikri pappamöppu sem er merkt *Þjóðfræði vaxandi safn; H.Í. 30 (vaxandi safn)*[9] og er gerð 19. mars 1978 í Garðabæ (ESig, 1r). Ókindarkvæði er á bl. 11r.

Þriðja handritið, ÞÞ 6463 (3r), er í vörslu þjóðháttasafns Þjóðminjasafns Íslands. Það er uppskrift eftir Laufeyju Sigursveinsdóttur (1905–2000) úr Vík í Lóni, send sem svar við 59. spurningaskrá Þjóðminjasafnsins, *Þulur og gátur* (1984–2) sem var send út í maí 1984.[10]

Hér verða tekin saman þau textabrigði sem eru sameiginleg fyrir 537, RSt, ESig og ÞÞ 6463 en ekki algeng í öðrum handritum 19.–20. aldar (til samanburðar eru hér aðeins sýndar 19. aldar heimildir úr meirihlutahóp handrita sem handritin fjögur standa gegn):

1. Upphafið: *Barnið í dalnum það datt*“ (537, RSt; *Barnið í dalnum, datt* ESig, ÷ komman ÞÞ 6463) vs. *Það var barn í dalnum, sem datt* (÷ komman 3315 og 936; *ÍGSVÞ*, sbr. 587).

[7] Sbr. SÁM 30a og SÁM 30b, ÞÞ 6412 (bl. 3) og víðar.

[8] Upplýsingar um rithöndina á kverinu og ættir Ragnhildar og Bjargar lét Vésteinn Ólason fylgja eftirriti sínu á uppskrift afa síns (tölvubréf, 14. janúar 2013). Um dánarár Ragnhildar sjá Þorbjörgu [R. Pálsdóttur] (2019, 62).

[9] Merkið *HÍ 30* er venjulega á efni sem tengdist þjóðfræðasöfnun Hallfreðar Arnar Eiríkssonar. Stór hluti þess varð síðar að SÁM 30a–SÁM 30c, en sumt hefur ekki náðst að fara yfir við skráningu á SÁM 30a–SÁM 30c. Í doktorsritgerð minni (Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir 2020, 65 og víðar) var vísað í sumt af því sem „SÁM 30 (óskráð gögn).“

[10] Af orðalagi uppskriftar Elísabetar Sigurðardóttur má ráða að hún hafi líklega svarað svipaðri spurningaskrá, e.t.v. forvera 59. spurningaskrár Þjóðminjasafnsins.

2. Seinni hluti 1. erindis og fyrri hluti 2. erindis: *en fyrir neðan* (537, + *þar* RSt, *neðan*: „niðan“ ÞÞ 6463) vs. *en þar fyrir neðan* (3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936). Hér er ESig reyndar í hóp með 3315 o.fl. handritum en segja má að RSt feti meðalveg milli *en fyrir neðan* og *en þar fyrir neðan*.
3. Seinni hluti 3. er. og fyrri hluti 4. er.: *út úr bænum* (537, RSt, ESig) vs. *út um dyrnar* (3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 (4. er., en 3. er.: *út í dyrnar*)). ÞÞ 6463 er með *út úr dyrum* og fetar þannig meðalveg þar sem til er vitneskja um forsetninguna *út úr* í þessu samhengi en þó er notað orðið *dyr*, eins og í meirihluta handrita kvæðisins.
4. Seinni hluti 9. er. og fyrri hluti þess 10. – miðað við tölusetningu í *ÍGSVÞ* – hefst á *þar til* (537, ESig, ÞÞ 6463) vs. *þangað til* (3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 og reyndar RSt).
5. Í 11. er. hefur Ókindin sig *hraðast* á kreik (537, ESig; *sem hraðast* RSt) vs. *aftur* (3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 og reyndar ÞÞ 6463).

Tilbrigði á þessum fimm stöðum sýna að af 537, RSt, ESig og ÞÞ 6463 standa a.m.k. þrjú saman hverju sinni gegn hinum handritunum (meirihlutahópnum). Tilbrigðin eru ekki mjög mikil eða merkileg hvert fyrir sig, einkum fyrir munnlega geymd, en þegar þau eru tekin saman setja þau nokkuð sterkan svip á þennan handritahóp. Reiknist mér rétt til eru líkurnar á því að samstæð tilbrigði á þessum fimm stöðum hafi komið til í fjórum handritum fyrir tilviljun innan við 1%. ÞÞ 6463 stendur svolítið til hliðar en 537, RSt og ESig mynda einhvers konar kjarna í hópnum ef skoðuð eru þau textabrigði sem snúast um merkingarrík orð, þ.e. *bænum* vs. *dyrnar* og einkum *hraðast* vs. *aftur*. Handritin fjögur standa einnig oft saman þegar um er að ræða tilbrigði sem sjást fyrst í þessum litla handritahóp en verða algeng í yngri handritum (og voru því ekki talin upp hér að framan). Má nefna *brek og hljóð* (ESig, ÞÞ 6463;[11] *breka hljóð* RSt, sem er einstakt tilbrigði) vs. *miklu hljóð* (3315, 587, *ÍGSVÞ*, 936 og nokkur síðari tíma handrit, t.d. uppskrift Ástríðar Thorarensen 1970–1971 í HÍ 30, (21r–22r) í grænni stílabók í ljósgrænni pappamöppu, hér eftir ÁTh). Þessi sameiginlegu sérkenni gera þessum litla en staðfasta hóp með gamlar rætur kleift að heita ‚gerð‘ óháð fjölda öftustu erinda (sem verður þó greint frá síðar). Til að rugla ekki kerfi Jóns Samsonarsonar verður hér gengið út frá því að þessir textar myndi *B-gerð* – til aðgreiningar frá *A-gerð*, þ.e. algengari textum.[12]

Hvert handritanna í B-gerð hefur sín sérkenni. Í 537 er textinn langstystur en fellur annars vel inn í hóp 19. aldar heimilda. 537 hefur t.d. *Ætla* í 4.–5. er., eins og önnur 19. aldar handrit, en á 20. öld verður þátíðin *ætlaði* einnig algeng (RSt, ÁTh, ÞÞ 6919 (bl. 5) o.fl.) ásamt öðrum tilbrigðum (sbr. umfjöllun um ESig). Annað dæmi er *sín brekin mjög ljót* aftast í kvæðinu (537 og hinar heimildirnar frá 19. öld), en *sín brekin ljót* eða *brekin sín ljót* verður algengara á 20. öld.[13] 537 hefur þó einnig nokkur einkenni sem verða mun meira áberandi á 20. öld, t.d. *það barn* í fyrri hluta 3. er. (þannig líka SÁM 30a, SÁM 30b, ÁTh o.fl.) vs. *barn* í hinum 19. aldar heimildunum. Loks eru í 537 tvö einstæð textabrigði þótt ekki séu áberandi: *sá* (vs. *hann* í hinum handritunum) og *ei* (vs. *ekki*) í 10. er.

[11] Sbr. t.d. ÞÞ 6412 og ÞÞ 6905 (bl. 2).

[12] Ekki er búist við því að þetta sé endanleg gerðaskipan kvæðisins, en á hljóðupptökum eru mörg tilbrigði sem verður fjallað um á öðrum vettvangi.

[13] *Sín brekin ljót*: RSt, ESig, ÞÞ 6412. *Brekin sín ljót*: ÞÞ 6905 (bl. 3), ÞÞ 7053 (bl. 1).

Texti RSt stendur ekki langt frá 19. aldar heimildum þótt hann hafi nokkur einkenni sem eru algengari í handritum frá 20. öld, t.d. þátíðina *ætlaði* (4.–5. er.) og *sín brekin ljót* undir lok kvæðisins (sbr. hér að framan). Í RSt eru líka textabrigði sem eru sjaldgæf eða jafnvel einstæð í handritum bæði á 19. og 20. öld, en hér að framan voru nefnd *örlítil* tönn (4. er.), *breka hljóð* (6. er.) og *sem hraðast* (11. er.). Enn má nefna *í þessum stað* í 9. er. (vs. *í þeim stað* í flestum handritum) og *var ekki seinn* í 10. er. (vs. *og ekki var hann seinn* annars staðar). Meðal athugaverðustu tilbrigðanna eru *ókindin labbaði ofan í fljót* (12. er.) vs. *ókindin hafði sig ofan í fljót* í öllum þekktum handritum kvæðisins nema ÞÞ 6905 (bl. 3) sem styður RSt. Það er enn fremur eina handritið til viðbótar RSt með tilbrigðið *sem hraðast* sem er annars einkennandi fyrir handrit B-gerðar; handritið hefur þó engin önnur einkenni B-gerðar. ÞÞ 6905 er uppskrift Svövu Jónsdóttur (1909–2001) úr Geitavík í Borgarfirði eystra og er í vörslu þjóðháttasafns Þjóðminjasafns Íslands.

Sérkenni Ókindarkvæðis í ESig eru einkum í 4.–7. er. (sem vantar flest í 537). Í stað *ætla (j)eg að úr því hryti* (allar 19. aldar heimildir) segir í ESig: *Ég ætlaðist til að úr þér hrykki* ein lítil tönn (4. er.) og augað blátt (5. er.).[14] *Ég ætlaðist til* í ESig virðist vera einstætt í handritum kvæðisins – sem og *Ég hefi heyrt að úr því hryti […]* á sama stað í ÞÞ 6463. Annað sérkenni ESig er viðsnúningur í seinni hluta 5. er.: *Hún kvað við af kæti og kallaði mjög hátt* vs. *hún kallaði með kæti og kvað við svo hátt* í öllum 19. aldar heimildum. Sami viðsnúningurinn – án *mjög* – er í ÞÞ 6463, SÁM 30a og SÁM 30b. Loks eru tvö textabrigði í 7. er. ESig einstæð í handritum: *brekastand* (vs. *brekastát* eða *breka stát* í flestum handritum) og *þitt dramb* vs. *þinn grát* í flestöllum handritum.

Í ÞÞ 6463 er sjaldgæft textabrigði strax í 2. og 3. er.: viðsnúningurinn *naumlega náði hún* (þannig líka ÞÞ 6542) vs. *náði hún því naumlega* í öllum 19. aldar heimildum (á 20. öld breytist *því* oft í *þá* eða *þó*). Sérkenni ÞÞ 6463 í 4.–6. er. voru rædd í tengslum við ESig, en í 7. er. hefur ÞÞ 6463 *maklegast væri þú mættir setja upp grát* [svo – *YSH*] vs. *maklegast væri (j)eg minnkaði þinn grát* í öllum 19. aldar heimildum og nokkrum handritum frá 20. öld.[15] Annað einstætt tilbrigði er *barði* (vs. *lamdi* í hinum handritunum) í 8. er.

Öftustu erindin, annað með uppeldisboðskap og hitt með kvæðaheitinu og ávarpi til barnsins sem hlýðir á (þau væru 12. og 13. er. skv. tölusetningu í *ÍGSVÞ*), eru í flestum heimildum frá 19. öld (÷ 13. er. 537, ÷ bæði erindin *ÍGSVÞ*) og flestum handritum B-gerðar (÷ 13. er. 537). RSt er með nokkur sérkenni í öftustu erindunum, eins og lýst var hér, en mjög lítið ber á milli ESig og 19. aldar heimilda. Í ÞÞ 6463 er 13. er. og upphaf 12. er. sömuleiðis lítt frábrugðið 19. aldar heimildum – en seinni hluti 12. er. er einstæður í handritum kvæðisins, auk þess að 13. erindi fylgir aukavísa (14. er.) í sama dúr og 12. er.:

[14] Sagnmyndin *hrykki* er einnig í 5. er. í uppskrift Sigríðar Steinbjörnsdóttur (Jón Samsonarson 1998) og í 4. og 5. er. í uppskrift Jóhannesar Björnssonar (f. 1907) í vörslu þjóðháttasafns Þjóðminjasafnsins, ÞÞ 6542 (bl. 14), en í þessum tveimur uppskriftum fer sögnin *trúa* saman við *hrykki*: *Þá trú ég að úr því hrykki ein lítil tönn* og síðan *[…] augað blátt* í ÞÞ 6542 og *Úr því trúi eg að hrykki eitt auga blátt* í 5. er. í uppskrift Sigríðar (en þó *ætla jeg að úr því hryti ein lítil tönn* í 4. er.). *Eitt auga blátt* í uppskrift Sigríðar virðist vera einsdæmi í handritum. Fornafnið *þér* í ESig (vs. *því*) er hins vegar í fleiri handritum kvæðisins og er orðalagið þá jafnan *Ætlaði (ég) að úr þér hryti augað blátt*, t.d. í ÁTh, ÞÞ 6905 (bl. 2) og ÞÞ 6919 (bl. 5).

[15] Í öðrum 20. aldar handritum eru smávægilegri tilbrigði á borð við *maklegt væri að minnka (við) þinn grát* (ÁTh og ÞÞ 6412).

Ókindin hafði sig ofan í fljót
Þar sökk hún Grýla því hún var svo ljót.
Ókindar kvæðið endar nú hér
en Sigríður litla sjáðu að þér.
Sigríður litla sjáðu þinn mátt
bítur hún börnin og ber þau svo dátt.

Síðasta erindið endurómar 8. er. í Grýlukvæði Guðmundar Erlendssonar: „býta kvadst hun bǫrninn og blæda läta j skjel“ (sbr. Parsons 2013, 220). Annars er lítið hægt að segja um þessa viðbót að svo stöddu – nema að á einni hljóðupptökunni (SÁM 92/2620 EF) kveðst heimildarmaður alltaf hafa haldið að Ókindin væri Grýla, en erfitt hafi verið að hugsa sér aðra eins ófreskju.

**Útbreiðsla B-gerðar**

Ekki er heldur gott að segja á þessu stigi málsins hvenær eða hvernig B-gerð Ókindarkvæðis varð til. Fyrst verður vart við hana í uppskrift Jóns Ólafssonar alþingismanns (f. 1850) sem er af sömu kynslóð og Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir (f. 1848) þótt uppskrift hans sé miklu eldri en RSt.

Nærtækast er að gera ráð fyrir því að Ókindarkvæði hafi varðveist í ætt Bjargar Pétursdóttur og hafi verið kennt börnum og barnabörnum. Sigríður Árnadóttir, sem kvæðið var trúlega ort til, lést vissulega ung ásamt kornabarni sínu (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 5:216), en Stefán Árnason, prófastur á Kirkjubæ og sonur Bjargar, átti fjölda barna, þeirra á meðal Þórunni og Björgu. Þórunn varð seinni kona Benedikts Þórarinssonar á Ási í Fellum og víðar (s.r., 4:312), en Benedikt skrifaði m.a. fornkvæði og þulur eftir Björgu Pétursdóttur (Jón Helgason 1962–1981, 6:xxx–xxxii). Ókindarkvæði virðist reyndar ekki vera meðal þeirra uppskrifta, enda er það ekki fornkvæði. Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir gat t.d. lært kvæðið af eiginmanni sínum, Páli Benediktssyni og Þórunnar, eða frændfólki hans. Annar möguleiki er að Ragnhildur, sem var fædd í Stakkahlíð í Loðmundarfirði, hafi lært kvæðið þar á heimaslóðum, Sigríður Árnadóttir hafði einmitt flust í Loðmundarfjörð, á Klyppstað (steinsnar frá Stakkahlíð), með eiginmanninum, Þorsteini Jónssyni. Þau bjuggu vissulega ekki lengi þar (1825–1827) og mun fyrr en Ragnhildur fæddist, en einhverjar líkur eru á því að Sigríður hafi farið með Ókindarkvæði fyrir fólkið í Loðmundarfirði og kvæðið hafi varðveist þar – hugsanlega í svolítið frábrugðinni gerð.

Ekki er náinn skyldleiki milli Jóns Ólafssonar og Ragnhildar að því ég best veit, en þó hrærðust þau í sama umhverfi. Nægir að nefna að Ragnhildur átti eftir að flytja nær Kolfreyjustað og búa á Gilsá, eða það að eldri hálfbróðir Jóns, Páll Ólafsson, kvæntist Þórunni Pálsdóttur, barnabarni Guðmundar sýslumanns Péturssonar (bróður Bjargar Pétursdóttur) og konu hans, Þórunnar Pálsdóttur Guðmundssonar, prófasts í Vallanesi (móðurbróður Bjargar), meðan Jón var enn á barnsaldri (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 4:134).

Hljóðupptökur hafa ekki verið skoðaðar sérstaklega fyrir þessa stuttu ritgerð, en þó ber að geta þess að Þorbjörg, dóttir Ragnhildar Stefánsdóttur og Páls Benediktssonar, og Lára Inga Lárusdóttir og Þorbjargar fara þar báðar með B-gerð Ókindarkvæðis (SÁM 92/3260 EF, SÁM 14/4234). Texti Láru Ingu er einkar forvitnilegur fyrir þrennar sakir. Í fyrsta lagi vantar í kvæðið sömu erindin og í uppskrift Jóns Ólafssonar; seinni hluti 5. er. hjá Láru Ingu er nákvæmlega eins, með rímorðinu *nátt* (sbr. kafla 2). Í öðru lagi er textabrigðið *Barnið í dalnum* hjá Láru Ingu, eins og í RSt (sbr. kafla 3), en ekki hjá Þorbjörgu móður hennar; það virðist hafa stokkið yfir eina kynslóð heimildarmanna í sömu ættinni. Lára Inga gat að sjálfsögðu lært *Barnið í dalnum* beint af Ragnhildi ömmu sinni. Ekki verður sagt með vissu hvort Þorbjörg lærði B-gerð með eða án *Barnið í dalnum* og þá hvar, en nærtækast væri að ætla að Þórunn Stefánsdóttir, amma hennar, hafi kennt henni. Í þriðja lagi er textabrigðið *labbaði sig* einstakt hjá Láru Ingu og Þorbjörgu móður hennar, sbr. *labbaði* í RSt (sjá kafla 3) sem er jafnframt elsta vitnið um sögnina *labba* í kvæðinu. Leiða mætti getum að því að textinn, sem varðveittist í ætt Bjargar Pétursdóttur, hafi verið B-gerð kvæðisins en að textabrigðið *labbaði* (og jafnvel *Barnið í dalnum*) hafi hugsanlega komið í B-gerð Ragnhildar megin frá. Hitt er alveg ljóst að Ókindarkvæði dreifðist víðar í ætt Ragnhildar. Bróðurdóttir hennar, Stefanía Sigurðardóttir (Hjálmar Vilhjálmsson 1972, 4), fer með texta sem hefur sum einkenni B-gerðar kvæðisins – ásamt textabrigðinu *labbaði* – á hljóðupptökunni SÁM 85/250 EF.

Elísabetu Sigurðardóttur (heimildarmann ESig) hef ég ekki náð að tengja við aðra heimildarmenn B-gerðar, en upplýsingar um framættir hennar virðast vera af skornum skammti. Þó er vitað að Sigurður Einarsson, faðir hennar, fæddist 1851 að Stakahjalla í Hjaltastaðaþinghá og að foreldrar hans bjuggu þar (Hulda Pétursdóttir 1982, 4). Sigurður var því af sömu kynslóð og Jón Ólafsson og Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir og bjó ekki langt frá Kirkjubæ í Hróarstungu þar sem Björg Pétursdóttir kvað Ókindarkvæði. Þar í grennd eru og Rauðholt, þar sem Elísabet Sigurðardóttir ólst upp, og Bóndastaðir. Ingileif og Sigbjörn, systkini Elísabetar, fara einnig með B-gerð Ókindarkvæðis (SÁM 85/327 EF, SÁM 85/331 EF).

Hingað til hefur B-gerð Ókindarkvæðis aðeins verið staðsett í Fljótsdalshéraði og austur á fjörðum. Laufey Sigursveinsdóttir, sem er heimildarmaður sérstæða textans í ÞÞ 6463, er hins vegar úr Vík í Lóni. Laufey er að vísu fjarskyld Jóni Ólafssyni, en sameiginlegir forfeður þeirra voru uppi á 18. öld – og líklegt er að ættleggur hennar hafi flust í Lón áður en Ókindarkvæði var ort, eða þá um svipað leyti. Því er ólíklegt að B-gerð kvæðisins hafi borist í Lón á þeim tíma. Hitt er mun sennilegra sem Vésteinn Ólason benti mér á í tölvubréfi (14. maí 2024). Í upphafi þessa kafla var nefnd Björg Stefánsdóttir sem hefur trúlega heyrt Ókindarkvæði hjá Björgu Pétursdóttur, ömmu sinni. Sonur Bjargar Stefánsdóttur var Páll Vigfússon. Vésteinn skrifar:

> Páll [Benediktsson] var sem ungur maður eitthvað í námi hjá séra Sigurði Gunnarssyni á Hallormsstað og þar kynntist hann bróðurdóttur prests, Ragnhildi Stefánsdóttur […]. Árið 1880 var haldið þrefalt brúðkaup á Hallormsstað, gefin saman: Ragnhildur og Páll [Benediktsson], Elísabet Sigurðardóttir Gunnarssonar og Páll Vigfússon […] og Margrét Sigurðardóttir Gunnarssonar og séra Jón Jónsson. Haltu þér nú: Séra Jón var um þessar mundir prestur í Bjarnanesi í Hornafirði, en fluttist svo að Stafafelli í Lóni, þar sem afkomendur hans

> hafa búið síðan. […] Þarna er komin bein tenging í Lónið frá þessu Hallormsstaða–Fljótsdals umhverfi.

Þar sem um er að ræða skyldmenni Ragnhildar Stefánsdóttur og mikil samskipti voru greinilega þeirra á milli er líklegt að kvæðatextinn, sem má gera ráð fyrir að hafi flust yfir í Lón ásamt Margréti Sigurðardóttur og Jóni Jónssyni, síðar prófasti í Stafafelli, hafi verið kominn annaðhvort frá tengdafjölskyldu Ragnhildar eða frá bernskuslóðum hennar, eins og greinir frá hér að framan.

**Niðurstöður**

Hér var sýnt fram á tengsl allra texta B-gerðar Ókindarkvæðis sem nú eru þekktir í handritum (ásamt nokkrum textum á hljóðupptökum). Varðveisla B-gerðar og tengsl heimildarmanna hennar sýnir að hér er um að ræða þéttan textahóp, ekki tilviljunarkenndar breytingar í munnlegri geymd. Jón Ólafsson, ritstjóri, og Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir virðast standa við upphaf B-gerðar, en ekki verður skorið úr um það hvernig þau lærðu kvæðið. Þeir þættir sem mest hafa stuðlað að útbreiðslu B-gerðar eru ættartengsl (einkum í ættum Bjargar Pétursdóttur og Ragnhildar Stefánsdóttur), landfræðileg grennd (sbr. einkum ESig, en einnig ÞÞ 6463 og hugsanlega RSt) og félagslegt og menningarlegt umhverfi (537 og ÞÞ 6463).

Um leið er ljóst að heimildir B-gerðar standa mun nær höfundi Ókindarkvæðis – ef ekki höfundartexta kvæðisins – en 3315, uppskrift Gísla Brynjólfssonar yngri eftir Guðrúnu Stefánsdóttur, móður sinni, sem er með elstu textum A-gerðar. Guðrún var úr öðrum landshluta og bjó aðeins í nokkur ár á Austurlandi (1824–1827).[16] Hún gat vissulega hafa lært kvæðið af eiginmanni sínum, Gísla Brynjólfssyni eldri, en Sigurður, bróðir hans, var kvæntur Ingveldi Jónsdóttur, systur Þorsteins þess sem var kvæntur Sigríði Árnadóttur sem Ókindarkvæði var ort til (Páll Eggert Ólason 1948–1952, 4:214). Gísli ólst upp í Heydölum í Breiðdal (s.r., 1:275), eða innan við 10 km frá Gilsá þangað sem Ragnhildur Stefánsdóttir flytur eftir nokkra áratugi, í svipuðu umhverfi og Jón Ólafsson elst upp í enn færri áratugum síðar (og tveimur fjörðum frá). Af þessu má álykta að á þessum slóðum hafi líklega gengið báðar gerðar Ókindarkvæðis sem hér hefur verið fjallað um, en að svo komnu máli verður varla úr því skorið hvor gerðin kynni að vera nær texta Bjargar Pétursdóttur.

**Heimildir**

**Frumheimildir**

*Landsbókasafn Íslands – Háskólabókasafn, Reykjavík*
Lbs 537 4to, Lbs 587 4to, Lbs 936 4to
*Konungsbókhlaða, Kaupmannahöfn*
NKS 3315 II 4to

[16] Sbr. *Ísmús* https://beta.ismus.is/einstaklingar/2652/stadir athugað 12. maí 2024.

*Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, Reykjavík*

SÁM 30a, SÁM 30b

HÍ 30 (óskráð gögn úr söfnun þjóðfræða í handritageymslu Stofnunar Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum), þar á meðal:

Uppskrift Ástríðar Thorarensen (1970–1971) [hér táknað ÁTh]

Uppskrift Elísabetar Sigurðardóttur á Bóndastöðum (1978) [hér táknað ESig]

Hljóðrit í vörslu stofnunar: SÁM 14/4234, SÁM 85/250 EF, SÁM 85/327 EF, SÁM 85/331 EF, SÁM 92/2620 EF, SÁM 92/3260 EF

*Handrit í einkaeigu*

Handrit í eigu Vésteins Ólasonar [hér táknað RSt]

*Þjóðháttasafn Þjóðminjasafns Íslands, Reykjavík*

ÞÞ 6412, ÞÞ 6458, ÞÞ 6463, ÞÞ 6542, ÞÞ 6905, ÞÞ 6919, ÞÞ 7053, ÞÞ 7329

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# TRÖLLASÖGUR: FJÖGUR ÞEMU

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir*

Tröll koma víða fyrir í íslenskum sagnaarfi. Tröllasögur, sem hefðbundið þema ólíkra frásagna, falla sumar hverjar undir sagnir frá síðari öldum á meðan aðrar heyra til bókmennta fyrri alda, og þá einkum fornaldarsagna frá 14. öld. Fornaldarsögur fjalla, eins og nafnið gefur til kynna, um hetjur fortíðarinnar, fólk sem bjó í Skandinavíu og átti að hafa verið uppi áður en landnám hófst á Íslandi. Sögurnar eru ekki sannar, þannig séð, og þótt margar þeirra eigi rætur að rekja til aldagamalla munnmæla eru þær flestar hverjar skáldskapur sem er skrifaður inn í ákveðið samhengi.[1]

Í þessari grein verður fjallað um tröll eins og þau koma fyrir í fornaldarsögum. Rætt verður um heimkynni þeirra, útlitseinkenni og að hvaða leyti þau skera sig frá hinum dæmigerðari hetjum sagnanna. Í framhaldinu verður rætt um samskipti söguhetja og trölla, og viðhorf hetjanna til þeirra. Áhersla verður lögð á mismunandi túlkanir á tröllum, og verða þau skoðuð út frá fjórum þemum.

**Vættir í villtri náttúru**

Þótt hér verði einungis fjallað um tröll eins og þau koma fyrir í fornaldarsögum er ljóst að þau deila einkennum með annars konar yfirnáttúrulegum vættum úr íslenskri sagnahefð, enda er að jafnaði erfitt að flokka vættir – þær eru jú margbreytilegar. Sé litið á heimkynni vætta úr fornaldarsögum sérstaklega, eiga þau það semeiginlegt að vísað er í norður, austur eða einfaldlega norðaustur. Þrátt fyrir þetta þá getur verið erfitt að finna mörk þessara heima, vættabyggðanna, og hvar þau taka við af byggðum sveita norrænna þjóða. Í sumum tilvikum eru þau þó að einhverju leyti landfræðileg, ekki einungis með því að liggja í norðaustri, heldur getur verið að um sé að ræða skil í sjálfu

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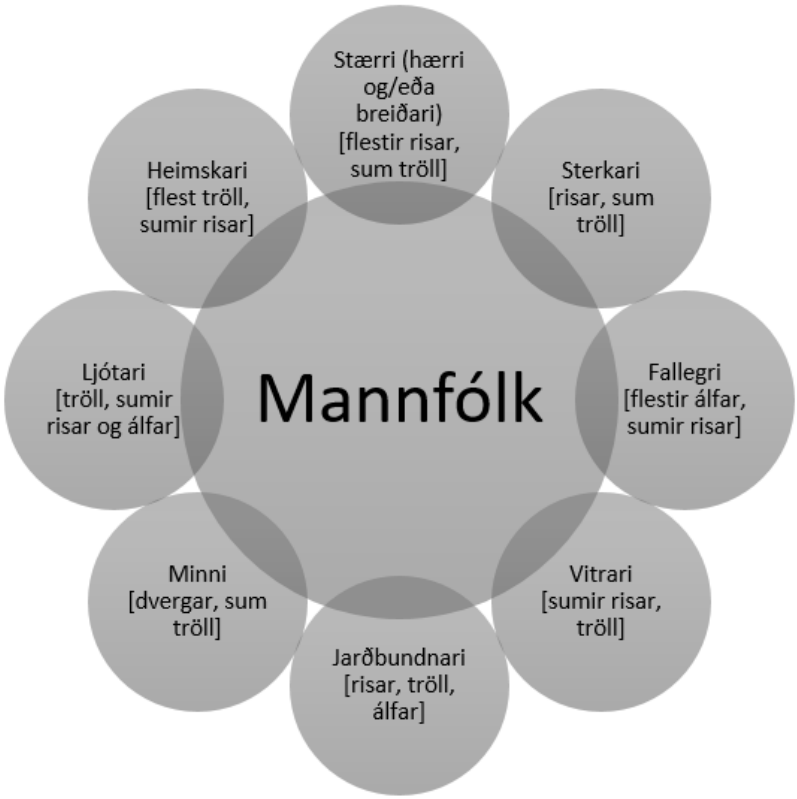
[1] Flestar fornaldarsögur voru ritaðar á 13. og 14. öld, þótt líklegt sé að allra yngstu sögurnar hafi ekki verið skráðar fyrr en á 15. öld. Góðan almennan inngang er t.d. að finna hjá Mitchell 1991, 8–90.

landslaginu eða náttúrufarinu, svo sem með vatni eða ám, þoku, eyjum eða útnesjum, eða með því að sögusviðið er einfaldlega fært yfir á afskiptan stað, svo sem inn í helli eða haug. Að sumu leyti þá er þetta annar heimur, eins konar vættaheimur, en þó er langt því frá að um sé að ræða einhvern einsleitan „annan heim“, því að ekki einungis felur hann í sér eðlisólíkar vættir, heldur eru sumar þessara vætta líkari okkur sjálfum en aðrar (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 21–26).

Samkvæmt fornaldarsögunum liggja dæmigerðar vættabyggðir í Álfheimum, Bjarmalandi, Finnmörku, Gandvík, Geirröðargörðum, Hellulandi, Hundingjalandi, Jötunheimum og Risalandi. Orð sem notuð eru til að lýsa þessum byggðum eða bústöðum vættanna sérstaklega eru einkenni í landslagi á borð við *óbyggðir*, *skóga*, *steina*, *eyjur*, *berg*, *fjöll* og *hóla*. Vættabyggðir eru sem sagt fyrir utan við það sem kalla mætti siðmenntað samfélag miðalda, úti í hinni villtu náttúru, eða þeirri náttúru sem mannfólkið hafði enn ekki tamið eða nytjað, eins og hálendið og skógana. Þetta eru því jaðarsvæði, í landfræðilegum og samfélagslegum skilningi. Orð eins og *berg*, *steinn* og *hóll* gefa þar að auki til kynna að vættirnar búi ekki einungis úti í náttúrunni heldur beinlínis *í* henni; þær séu hluti af náttúrunni og nánast e.k. náttúruvættir.


Stærri (hærri og/eða breiðari) [flestir risar, sum tröll]
Sterkari [risar, sum tröll]
Fallegri [flestir álfar, sumir risar]
Vitrari [sumir risar, tröll]
Jarðbundnari [risar, tröll, álfar]
Minni [dvergar, sum tröll]
Ljótari [tröll, sumir risar og álfar]
Heimskari [flest tröll, sumir risar]
Mannfólk

Mynd 1. Skýringarmynd yfir helstu einkenni vætta í samanburði við mannfólk eða sögupersónur íslenskra miðaldabókmennta.

Það sem er fyrst og fremst sameiginlegt flestum þeim sögum sem segja með einhverju móti frá yfirnáttúrulegum vættum, er að þær fjalla um samskipti þeirra við menn og í flestum tilvikum þá stafar söguhetjunum hætta af vættum hinnar villtu náttúru. Séu vættir sagnanna bornar saman við menn eða mannfólk, þá eru þær yfirleitt meiri eða minni að einhverju leyti, og nálgast einhverskonar öfgar sem skera sig frá fyrirfram skilgreindu mannlegu eðli, en af þessu leiðir að yfirnáttúrulegar vættir geta auðveldlega tekið á sig svip framandleika eða einhvers konar ómennsku (sbr. Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 189). Af þessari skýringarmynd getum við séð helstu einkenni vætta í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum, en eins og sjá má þá nær hún yfir tröll, risa, álfa og dverga.[2]

Ef við lítum á tröllin sérstaklega þá sjáum við að þau eru álitin skera sig frá mönnum hvað varðar stærð, og eru þá ýmist stór, lítil eða mikil um sig, þau eru jarðbundin, sterk, ófríð og af lágu kyni. Útliti þeirra er að jafnaði lýst á neikvæðan hátt, eða jafnvel kómískan, en þar að auki eru þau vanalega álitin fjandsamleg en þó jafnframt heimsk, þótt þau kunni að vera fjölkunnug eða búa yfir yfirskilvitlegri visku af einhverju tagi. Sjónarhornið er hetjunnar, sem ferðast frá suðlægari svæðum Skandinavíu, einkum Noregi, norður eða norðaustur til Finnmerkur, Bjarmalands, eða annara svæða norðan við heimsskautsbaug.

**Um dýrslegt eðli trölla**

Í sumum sagnanna, sérstaklega þeim sem eiga að gerast í Noregi, leggja hetjurnar af stað í hinar löngu hættufarir til norðurs og austur, til svæða sem byggð voru af Sömum og Björmum sérstaklega, ýmist í þeim tilgangi að skattleggja þessar fjarlægu og frumstæðu þjóðir, til að komast í betri veiðilendur og fiskimið, eða þá einungis til þess að ræna og láta greipar sópa um eigur þessara þjóðflokka, eða jafnvel bara til að berja á þeim og sýna þeim yfirburði sína. Það kemur því kannski ekki á óvart að viðhorfið til íbúa þessara svæða er að jafnaði neikvætt og þeir stundum kallaðir tröll og hálftröll, eða jafnvel flögð, risar eða jötnar.

Þessi hugtök, og önnur sjaldgæfari, eru notuð í ólíku samhengi og merkingarsvið þeirra getur verið breytilegt eftir því hvaða öld við erum að tala um eða í hvaða samhengi þau eru notuð. Sem dæmi má nefna að orðið *tröll*, eins og það er notað í íslenskum sagnaarfi, einskorðast alls ekki við þessa framandlegu íbúa norðursins, og getur falið í sér mismunandi merkingu innan mismunandi texta og samhengis, jafnvel þótt það sé, í flestum tilvikum notað um yfirnáttúrulegar og fjölkunnugar óvættir, eins og Ármann Jakobsson hefur bent á í rannsóknum sínum á merkingu orðsins (Schulz 2004, 39; Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 44–55; 2009, 182). Þrátt fyrir þetta hafa fræðimenn leitast við að einfalda skilgreiningar á tröllum, eins og t.d. Einar Ól. Sveinsson sem sagði að orðið tröll væri „haft um flögð, að því leyti sem þau eru óvættir“ (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1940, 144) eða John Lindow sem telur að einkenni trölla séu í grófum dráttum þrjú; stærð, styrkur og fjölkynngi, eða eins og hann segir: „… the trio of size, strength and magic serves to make a troll“ (Lindow 2014, 33). Á hinn bóginn má segja að í allri

[2] Myndin, sem er að sumu leyti yfirborðsleg, var upphaflega birt í Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017, 330. Sjá þar um fyrirvara og merkingarsvið myndarinnar.

umfjöllun um tröll, svo sem aðrar yfirnáttúrulegar verur úr íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum, sé mikilvægast að átta sig á því að hugtakið er alls ekki bundið við þessi þrjú einkenni, heldur getur það náð yfir afar ólíkar verur, sem flestar hverjar standa þó að einhverju leyti utan við mannlegt samfélag (sbr. Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 52).

Eins og fyrr segir er samfélag trölla yfirleitt bundið við afmörkuð svæði í norðausturhluta Skandinavíuskagans, á svæði sem var dreifbýlt, og í sögunum sjáum við tröllahjón eða litlar fjölskyldueiningar búa saman í helli eða skinntjaldi. Tröllin eru stundum sýnd þar sem þau sitja saman í helli sínum umhverfis eldstæði, þar sem þau éta og skiptast á grófum athugasemdum, jafnvel ruddalegum. Þeim er ávallt stillt upp sem andstæðu, og beinlínis ógn við hinar norrænu hetjur, sem virðist leyfilegt að ráðast gegn þeim og í sögunum er jafnvel ætlast til þess að þær geri það. Þetta tiltekna sagnaminni, þar sem karlhetjur berjast við tröllin í norðri (H945.2, Boberg 1966, 155), tilheyrir í raun almennara þema innan þjóðsagna jafnt sem bókmennta, þar sem hetjur reyna hreysti sína með því að berjast gegn yfirnáttúrulegum andstæðingum, m.ö.o. þeirri óreiðu sem getur ógnað sjálfsmynd þeirra, karlmannlegu valdi eða því siðmenntaða samfélagi sem þær sjálfar tilheyra (Helga Kress 1993, 119–27; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 21–26). Sögur af átökum manna og óvætta ná svo langt aftur sem til norrænna goðsagna, þar sem jötnar – eða íbúar Jötunheima – voru álitnir ógn við samfélag guðanna, og þeirri reglufestu sem þar ríkti. Í þeim tilgangi að halda þessum ógnandi öflum frá goðheimum virðist það einkum hafa verið hlutverk Þórs að berjast við jötnana og halda þeim í hæfilegri fjarlægð frá Ásgarði, heimkynnum Ása.

Í fornaldarasögunum kemur það eingöngu í hlut karla að berja á tröllum; þ.e.a.s. ungra karla í leit að ævintýrum og hetjulegum þroska; karla sem stíga út fyrir mörk hins þekkta heims, og einmitt – hetja sem eru tilbúnar að takast á við allt hið óvenjulega og jafnvel ómanneskjulega, því að hetjur þurfa jú á meiri og annars konar reynslu að halda en þeir bændasynir sem eftir sitja heima í héraði. Það þarf því ekki að koma á óvart að tröllin sem þeir fyrirfinna í þessari hetju- og hættuför til norðurs eru einkum kvenkyns; þetta eru tröllkonur, flagðkonur, skessur og gýgjar.[3] Eins og frægt er, geta lýsingar á kventröllum verið kostulegar,[4] t.d. lýsingin úr *Illuga sögu Gríðarfóstra*, þar sem segir af fyrsta fundi hetjunnar og tröllkonunnar. Athygli Illuga er öll á útliti skessunnar, eða Gríðar, sem hann horfir rannsakandi á. Í sögunni segir:

> … en honum þótti sem hríð eða hregg stæði ór nösum hennar. Horrinn hekk ofan fyrir munninn. Hún hafði skegg, ok [var] sköllótt um höfuðit. Hendr hennar váru sem arnarklær, en ermar báðar brenndar, en sá stakkr, er hún var í, tók henni eigi lengra en á lendar á bakit, en allt á tær í fyrir. Augu hennar váru græn, en ennit bratt, eyrun fellu víða. Engi mátti hana kalla fríða.
> (Rafn 1829–30, III:653)

[3] Um tröllkerlingar sérstaklega, sjá Helga Kress 1993, 119–35; Straubhaar 2001; Gallo 2006; sbr. einnig Arnold 2005, 123.

[4] Um útlit trölla í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum, sjá Hermann Pálsson 1997, 23–27; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 62–65.

Og í *Gríms sögu loðinkinna* segir:

> … þar sá hann [Grímur] brenna bjartan eld, ok sátu 2 tröll við eldin; þat var karl ok kellíng; þau spyrndust í iljar; þau voru í stuttum ok skörpum skinnstökkum bæði; gjörla sá hann, hversu þau voru í sköpun bæði í millum fótanna … (Rafn 1829–30, II:147)

Þótt sambærilegar lýsingar annarra sagna geti bætt ýmsu við það sem hér kemur fram, eru sameiginleg einkenni mörg og t.d. eru tröllkonurnar flestar hverjar ljótar; jafnvel afskræmdar. Þar að auki eru þær hlægilegar og flestar virðast þær vera með kvef – þar sem horinn hangir niður úr nösunum á þeim, e.t.v. til marks um norðurslóðirnar, og hin kuldalegu heimkynni tröllanna. Að auki eru þær margar hverjar klæddar skinnkyrtlum, sem eru þá síðir að framanverðu en stuttir í bakið, og þá iðulega ósæmilega stuttir. Að öðru leyti er þessum búningi tröllkvennanna lýst sem mjög einföldum í sniðum; þetta er einfaldlega skorpinn skinnstakkur, sem á væntanlega að vera til marks um frumstætt og jafnvel villimannslegt eðli þess fólks sem talið var búa í norðan- og norðaustanverðri Skandinavíu, þar sem vetur eru kaldir og sumur svöl.[5]

Þótt skinnstökkunum sé ekki lýst nákvæmlega, samræmast lýsingarnar þeim hugmyndum sem koma fram í annars konar miðaldabókmenntum, þar sem íbúar Norður-Skandinavíu eru einkum þekktir fyrir skinnvöru sína og skinntjöld. Einhverjir fræðimenn hafa meira að segja bent á þann möguleika að orðið Lappi, sem var stundum notað um þjóðflokka í nyrstu héruðum Noregs, Svíþjóðar, Finnlands og Rússlands, merki skinnpjatla, og vísi þar með til skinnklæðnaðarins (Hermann Pálsson 1997, 15 og 23; Zachrisson 2014, 245). Um þetta ber þó að fullyrða sem minnst, en það lítur út fyrir að sú almenna hugmynd sem fram kemur í fornaldarsögunum og snýr að klæðnaði sé kannski ekki svo langsótt. Á hinn bóginn er það þekkt minni í bókmenntunum að þeir sem klæðast skinnstakki eingöngu, eða dýrafeldi, afmennist um leið, og missi þannig tengsl sín við siðmenninguna. Að auki er það lýsingin af hinum stuttu og ósæmilegu skinnstökkum sem vekur athygli, og gefur tröllunum þetta gróteska útlit sem segja má að dragi fram dýrslegt eðli þeirra.

**Fjögur þemu**

Hingað til hefur hlutverk trölla í megindráttum verið túlkað með þrennum hætti, og er þá vanalega tekið mið af hinum ýktu útlitslýsingum tröllanna og frumstæðum klæðnaði þeirra. Í þeirri greiningu sem hér fer á eftir er verða tröllin þó skoðuð út frá fjórum þemum. Þau eru:

a) Búseta og hugmyndir um landfræðilega jöðrun.
b) Kynferði og hugmyndir um ýktar birtingarmyndir kvenna.
c) Tröll sem gróteskar jaðarfígúrur innan heimsmyndar fornaldarsagna.
d) Tröll sem fóstrur og uppalendur.

[5] Sjá ítarlegan samanburð 11 tröllkerlinga í Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017, 332–36.

Ég hef áður fjallað ítarlega um fyrstu þrjú þemun og því verður einungis stuttlega gerð grein fyrir þeim hér (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017, 336–47). Athyglin mun eftir það beinast að fjórða þemanu, sem felur í sér ferska sýn á efnið.

a) *Búseta og hugmyndir um landfræðilega jöðrun*

Samkvæmt norrænum heimildum almennt séð er ljóst að einkenni þeirra trölla sem fornaldarsögurnar segja frá eiga einnig við um Sama, þ.e.a.s. þjóðflokk sem bjó í norðanverðri Skandinavíu, þótt þeir hafi að vísu tekið sér búsetu víðar, einkum á hálendi (Zachrisson 2014, 244). En hvað tengir Sama við tröll? Jú, eins og ýmsir hafa áður bent á var Sömum gjarnan lýst sem svo að þeir væru breiðleitir, fávísir og að jafnaði fjölkunnugir (Hermann Pálsson 1997, 23–27; Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 247, 249–50, 255–56). Viðhorfið til þeirra var víðast hvar neikvætt, og þess eru dæmi í norskum lögum frá miðöldum að norrænu fólki hafi verið bannað að umgangast þá. Það kemur því ekki á óvart að Samarnir hafi sums staðar verið kallaðir tröll, reyndar rétt eins og fjölkunnugt fólk annars staðar. En með því að kalla íbúa Norðaustur Skandinavíu tröll er lögð áhersla á villimennsku Samanna, og af þeim sökum hafa fræðimenn bent á að sögurnar feli í sér rasíska hugmyndafræði, þar sem ýjað er að yfirburðum hinna norrænu og hefðbundnari íbúa Skandinavíuskagans; konunganna, höfðingjanna og þeirra bænda sem fornaldarsögurnar fjalla vanalega um; að þetta séu þá sögur um minnihlutahópa sem skera sig frá hinum norræna kynstofni, sögur sem varpi ljósi á það hvernig norrænir menn gætu hafa umgengist slíka hópa.[6]

Séu sögurnar lesnar með þeim hætti að tröllin beri vott um kynþáttafordóma er nauðsynlegt að hafa í huga að þekking miðaldafólks á umheiminum var takmörkuð. Tröllin eru þá fyrst og fremst íbúar jaðarsvæða, frá sjónarhóli þeirra sem sögðu sögurnar, og birtingarmynd þeirra til marks um óljósar hugmyndir fólks um fjarlægar þjóðir. Í þeim skilningi eru tröllin fulltrúar þess landfræðilega óþekkta eða ólíka, þess sem kallast á ensku máli „the Ethnic Other." Lýsingarnar falla þá inn í samhengi ferðasagna og furðuþjóðafrásagna, þar sem framandi útlitseinkenni þjóðflokka eru ýkt og allir þeir sem eru öðruvísi en við sjálf, viðmiðið, eru jaðraðir (Sverrir Jakobsson 2005, 250).

b) *Kynferði og hugmyndir um ýktar birtingarmyndir kvenna*

Fræðimenn sem hafa túlkað tröllin út frá útlitslýsingum í samhengi við hátterni þeirra eða hegðun hafa bent á að tröllkerlingarnar, sér í lagi, séu ekki einungis hlægilegar í augum hetjanna, heldur einnig viðurstyggilegar og jafnvel ógnandi (sjá umræðu í Helga Kress 1993, 119, 122–23). Að auki séu þær bæði ágengar og ástleitnar. Í þessu ljósi megi líta á þær sem ýktar kvenmyndir, sem endurspegli hræðslu hinna ungu karlhetja við náin samskipti við konur; hræðslu sem þó er nauðsynlegt að yfirvinna eigi hetjan að þroskast og verða að manni. Eins og fyrr segir þá eru söguhetjur fornaldarsagnanna ungir karlmenn, og þar af leiðandi er sjónarhornið karllægt. Sú staðreynd varpar ljósi á

[6] Fyrir almenna umræðu, sjá Mundal 2000 346–65. Sjá enn fremur: Gallo 2006, 8–9; Arngrímur Vídalín 2013, 202; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 77; Lavender 2014, 155.

það hvers vegna hið gróteska kynferði tröllkerlinganna er ýkt, og á meðan þær gætu þótt hlægilegar í augum hinna ungu karla, þá er þeim einnig lýst sem óaðlaðandi að öllu leyti.

Sem dæmi um þetta má nefna *Gríms sögu loðinkinna*, þar sem Geirríður Gandvíkurekkja neyðir hetjuna fyrst til að kyssa sig og síðan til að liggja hjá sér, og er þessu lýst sem afar óviðeigandi hegðun í garð hetjunnar (Rafn 1829–30, II:150–51). Með því að lesa söguna táknrænum skilningi, þá má vera að hin gróteska ímynd tröllkonunnar eigi einfaldlega að standa fyrir ýkta ímynd konu, og sýna þannig hræðslu ungra karla við konur sem kynverur, eða við kvenlega eiginleika þeirra (Helga Kress 1993, 119; Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 187; Bagerius 2009, 146). Sagan tekur þá einmitt á þessari hræðslu, sem hetjan verður að sigrast á. Annað dæmi um álíka reynslu er sagan af sambandi Örvar-Odds og Hildigunnar í *Örvar-Odds sögu* (Rafn 1829–30, II: 234). Ein átakanlegasta sagan af þessu tagi er þó frásögnin af sambandi þeirra Ketils úr Hrafnistu og Hrafnhildar Brúnadóttur, sem frá segir í *Ketils sögu hængs* (Rafn 1829–30, II:117–18, 123). Í öllum þessum sögum – og fleirum til – leika tröllkonurnar, sem eru staðsettar í fjarlægu landi, hlutverk í hetjuförinni sjálfri; í því þroskaferli þar sem ungur karlmaður verður fullþroska (sbr. einnig Roby 2020, 45).

Hið gróteska útlit tröllkvennanna hefur einnig verið túlkað sem svo að það sýni kynbundna fordóma, t.d. ef við lítum svo á að skessurnar tákni konur sem stíga út fyrir hefðbundin kvenhlutverk og hegðunarmynstur. Í þessu tilliti bera sögurnar vott um uppreisn gegn samfélagslegum gildum, þar sem kynferðislegar langanir kvenna eru bældar niður (Lavender 2014, 175). Það sem slík viðhorf segja okkur um íslenskt samfélag á 14. öld er að það beri að halda konum innan hefðbundinna viðmiða varðandi kynferðislega hegðun (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 69, 59–77; sbr. Helga Kress 1993, 119–28; Arnold 2005, 116–24; Bagerius 2009, 145). Fjölmörg dæmi úr sögunum styðja slíka túlkun, en hér ber þó að hafa í huga að þótt höfundar sagnanna einblíni meira á útlit og hegðun tröllkvenna, þá lýsa þeir í einstaka tilvikum grótesku útliti tröllkarla líka (t.d. Straubhaar 2001, 118). Slíkt gæti þá bent til þess að sjónarhornið sé fyrst og fremst félagslegt, þar sem tröll, kvenkyns og karlkyns, eru sett á jaðarinn, landfræðilega, samfélagslega og siðferðislega, og þar með á lægra plan.

Þessar tvær túlkunarleiðir, sem ná þá yfir rasíksar hugmyndir annars vegar og kynbundnar hugmyndir hins vegar, eru mun flóknari en hér gefst rúm til að ræða, en sameiginleg er sú sýn að líta beri á tröllin sem lægra settan samfélagshóp, frumstæðan, fyndinn og ófríðan í augum hetjanna, og að þar með tákni tröllin í rauninni allt sem við viljum ekki vera sjálf. Þau eru skilgreind af hugmyndum hinna siðmenntuðu um það hvað teljist vera eðlilegt og óeðlilegt í mannlegu fari.

c) *Tröll sem gróteskar jaðarfígúrur innan heimsmyndar fornaldarsagna*

Með því að líta á klæðnað tröllana sérstaklega, eða skinnstakkinn, hefur hann yfirleitt verið túlkaður sem hluti af þeirri lýsingu sem staðsetur tröllin á lægra plani; hann er þá bæði tákn um frumstæða lifnaðarhætti, sem og frumstæðar hvatir. Það getur því verið

áhugavert að líta nokkru nánar á skinnstakkinn sjálfan sem er þó ekki bara skinnstakkur; hann er síður að framan og stuttur í bakið – og það er okkur ítrekað sagt.

Í bókmenntalegu samhengi má benda á að þessi lögun stakksins er alls ekki óþekkt fyrirbæri og það ekki einungis hjá tröllum, heldur hirðmeyjum. Í *Möttuls sögu*, riddarasögu sem var þýdd úr frönsku yfir á norrænu á 13. öld, segir frá kyrtli sem er þeim undrum gæddur að hann breytir um lögun eftir því hvaða kona klæðist honum. Með þessu móti sýnir hann hvort konunni hafi verið spillt eða ekki, og með því að hlaupa svo ýmist upp að framan eða aftan, sýnir hann einnig hvar konan hefur verið snert; hlutverk möttlusins er m.ö.o. það að afhjúpa lauslæti kvennanna. Í sögunni eru það sex konur sem gangast undir prófið, og verða þær að aðhlátursefni hirðarinnar þegar kyrtillinn styttist á ýmsan máta. Þessi furðulega saga naut vinsælda á Íslandi, eins og sjá má af *Samsons sögu fagra*, þar sem efnið er tekið upp, og ekki síst í *Skikkjurímum*, sem ortar voru eftir sögunni á 15. öld, en þar er fjöldi kvennanna þó orðinn tólf og hegðun kyrtilsins þeim mun fjölbreytilegri (Finnur Jónsson 1905–22, II:343–51; Wilson 1953, 44–45). Í tveimur tilvikum styttist kyrtillinn í bakið, en heldur lengd sinni að framanverðu.

Tengsl kyrtilsins suðræna og hins norræna skorpna skinnstakks eru þau, að báðir varpa þeir ljósi á konur sem kynverur, og ýmist lauslátar eða kynferðislega ágengar. Þar sem í báðum tilvikum er um að ræða ósæmilega hegðun verða konurnar að aðhlátursefni, ýmist við hirðina eða í augum hinna ungu og áræðnu ferðalanga í norðri. Við þurfum þó að hafa í huga, að í fornaldarögunum er skinnstakkurinn ekki bundinn við konur eingöngu, þótt þær séu í meirihluta, og að tröllkörlum er að jafnaði ekki lýst á neitt gæfulegri hátt en kerlingunum. Og þar sem um er að ræða algengt minni innan sagnanna, lýsingar sem hljóta að teljast hluti af heimsmynd þeirra, er rétt að staldra við og spyrja af hvaða rótum sú heimsmynd sé sprottin, og hvort hún sé bundin við bókmenntirnar eingöngu eða tilheyri í stærra samhengi hugmyndaheimi miðalda.

Með því að skoða hinn afhjúpandi klæðnað í ljósi myndlistar frá miðöldum fáum við ótal dæmi um ósæmilegar myndir, m.a. þar sem afturendi manna og dýra gegnir veigamiklu hlutverki. Slíkar myndir eru þó oftar en ekki bundnar við jaðar, svo sem á byggingum, þar sem ufsagrýlur (e. gargoyles) spretta fram undan ufsum húsþaka eða við þakrennur, og er þar iðulega lögð áhersla á gróteskt útlit fígúranna og jafnvel óæðri líkamshluta.[7] Af sama tagi eru spássíuteikningar í handritum. Líkt og listfræðingar hafa tekið eftir fjölgar lýsingum eða spássíuteikningum af nöktu fólki, fólki með grótesk útlitseinkenni, dýrblendingum eða skrímslum, á síðmiðöldum. Þessi þróun er í takt við evrópska listasögu í víðara samhengi, þar sem aukin áhersla er lögð á fólk af lægri stéttum, þar með talda kotunga, leikara og hirðfífl. Það er ekki alltaf ljóst hvaða hlutverki slíkar myndir gegna, hvort sem er á byggingum eða í handritum, en þó hefur verið bent á að jaðarlist sem þessi, sem hefur að jafnaði áberandi grótesk og/eða karnivalísk einkenni (sbr. Benton 2000, 161–63), geti stuðlað að jafnvægi innan einstakra verka; með því að staðsetja gróteksar fígúrur á jaðri handrita, þ.e.a.s. spássíum þeirra, myndi þær mótvægi við háleitt umfjöllunarefnið, hvort sem um er að ræða lög, trúarlegt efni eða fræðsluefni. Með þessu verður heimur handritsins heill; með sama hætti eru lægra settir

[7] Um skemmtanagildi ufsagrýlna, sjá Benton 2000, 15.

samfélagsþegnar, minnihlutahópar og jaðarverur dregin fram í dagsljósið til að skapa heilsteypta heimsmynd, einskonar „status-quo“ ástand, sem er enn þann dag í dag mikilvægt gildi í allri umræðu um samfélagsmál (Camille 1992, 47, 107, 143). Jarðlegar verur, líkamlegar þarfir og jafnvel afskræming; allt getur þetta myndað mótvægi við lærða menningu og hina opinberu kirkjulist miðalda.

Í framhaldi af þessu mætti spyrja hvort ímynd tröllа, þar sem athyglin beinist að afturenda þeirra, gæti gegnt álíka hlutverki – þ.e. að stuðla að jafnvægi textans og skapa þannig heimsmynd sem er nógu víð til að fela í sér hið háa jafnt sem hið lága, hið æðra og hið óæðra, dyggðirnar og ódyggðirnar, visku og heimsku, siðmenningu og villimennsku, hið alvarlega og það léttvæga, og bókstaflega, toppinn og botninn? Ef við trúum því að þetta sé hið raunverulega hlutverk tröllanna, og hinna grótesku lýsinga, þá mætti allt eins segja að tröllabyggðir fornaldarsagnanna séu eins konar jaðarsvæði textans sjálfs, eða bókmenntaverksins. Rétt eins og ufsagrýlur kirkjubygginganna veita þær okkur óvænta tengingu við hversdagsheiminn; við það gróteska og ófullkomna. Með því að gera ráð fyrir að fornaldarsögur hafi verið, rétt eins og hin mismunandi form í myndlist miðalda, vettvangur heimsmyndar sem leitar jafnvægis, getum við séð hvað tröllinn leggja af mörkum til slíkrar heimsmyndar. Meyjarnar í *Möttuls sögu* og *Skikkjurímum*, rétt eins og hin afkáralegu tröll fornaldarsagnanna, eru því ekki einungis fulltrúar samfélagslegra viðmiða, heldur fela þau í sér hreint og beint karnivalískt skemmtanagildi.[8]

Með því að skoða þau þrjú þemu sem nú þegar hafa verið kynnt til sögunnar í samhengi höfum við komist nær einhvers konar heildarskilningi á hlutverki tröllа í fornaldarsögum. Sagan er þó ekki endilega öll sögð og hér á eftir verður gerð grein fyrir fjórða sjónarhorninu, sem snýst þá ekki um það hversu hátt við erum yfir tröllin hafin, heldur um það hvað við getum lært af þeim.

d) *Tröll sem fóstrur og uppalendur*

Þótt yfirnáttúrlegar vættir óbyggðanna séu, í flestum tilvikum, óvættir, þá er þetta ekki algild regla. Undantekning frá þessari stöðluðu ímynd tröllanna er þá sú að ein og ein skessan getur reynst vera heldur gáfaðri en hinar, og endar jafnvel sem vinur og velgjörðarmaður hetjunnar. Hún reynist því, þegar upp er staðið, vera góð vættur.[9] Þótt upphaflegur tilgangur hetjanna sé sjaldnast sá að vingast við tröllin eða vinna þau á sitt band, heldur berja á þeim, fyrst og fremst, þá gætu sögur af þessu tagi bent til þess að eiginleikar góðrar hetju felist ekki eingöngu í færni hennar til að fella óvininn, heldur einnig að bera kennsl á hið góða gagnvart hinu illa og nýta sér það. Það er t.d. merkilegt að í sumum tilvikum virðast vættir óbyggðanna geta endurspeglað hetjuna sjálfa hverju sinni, verið hættulegar ef hetjan kemur ekki vel fram við þær, en meinlausar ef hetjan sýnir æðruleysi gagnvart ógnandi útliti þeirra og háttsemi. Þessum hópi tilheyrir t.d.

[8] Nánar má lesa um þriðja þemað í Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017, 343–47.

[9] Sumar tröllkerlinganna eru ekki einungis hjálplegar, heldur verða þær eins konar fóstrur hetjanna, sbr. Gallo 2006, 3–12; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 73–76. Tröllkerlingar sem þessar eru yfirleitt vitrar og fara jafnvel með kveðskap (Straubhaar 2011, 101–12).

Brana úr *Hálfdanar sögu Brönufóstra*, sem er í upphafi sögu hálfmennk flagðkona sem ræðst á hetjuna Hálfdan þegar þau hittast í fyrsta skipti, eins og gera mátti ráð fyrir, en verður svo síðar vinur hans og verndarvættur (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2023, 7–8). Af sama tagi er Gríður úr *Illuga sögu Gríðarfóstra*, Skinnhúfa og Vargeisa úr *Hjálmþérs sögu og Ölvés* og jafnvel Skellinefja úr *Þorsteins sögu Víkingssonar*. Í sumum tilvikum verður meira að segja afar náið andlegt samband milli hetju og hjálpvættar af þessu tagi, líkt og þær fylgi hetjunum í ævintýrum þeirra, séu með þeim í huganum og veiti þeim styrk þegar þær þurfa mest á því að halda.

Með því að setja þessar sögur í samhengi við fyrri þemun þrjú hafa tröllin nú fengið aðeins víðari skírskotun, og þá er rétt að spyrja, áður en lengra er haldið, hvað það sé sem raunverulega tengir menn og vættir? Eins og áður hefur komið fram ferðast hetjurnar í norður og austur, þar sem þær komast í hann krappann, og snúa svo heim sem meiri menn eftir átök við hinar villtu vættir óbyggðanna. Þær snúa heim sem sigurvegarar. Í sögunum verður hinn heimurinn þannig séð hluti af athafnasvæði hetjunnar, og í honum búa þau öfl sem hetjunni er nauðsynlegt að takast á við, vilji hún öðlast þroska. Að því leyti þjónar hinn yfirnáttúrlegi heimur sagnanna þeim tilgangi að varpa ljósi á hreysti og afrek hetjunnar. Undantekningarlítið líta hetjurnar svo á að vættirnar séu með einhverjum hætti ógn við samfélag þeirra. Hlutverk hetjunnar felst þá í því að takast á við þau niðurrifsöfl sem ógna reiðunni, ráða niðurlögum þeirra og stuðla að heilbrigðari heimi, ekki ólíkt því sem Þór goðafræðinnar gerði í þágu Ásgarðs með því að fara til Jötunheima og berja á jötnunum.

Í vissum skilningi eru vondar söguvættir ekkert annað en huglæg afkvæmi okkar og þess vegna tengjumst við þeim, hvort sem okkur líkar það betur eða verr. Ef eiginleikar þeirra byggju ekki að einhverju leyti í okkur sjálfum væru þær merkingarlausar; við myndum ekki skilja þær. Með þessum hætti fela sögurnar í sér skýringu á löstum eða skuggahliðum fólks, og þar kemur í ljós að illvirkinn er í raun ekki mennskur, heldur af öðrum heimi. Tilhneiging okkar til að staðsetja hið óþekkta og það sem við hræðumst í öðrum heimi er einmitt hluti af þessu sama ferli, þ.e.a.s. því þegar við yfirfærum eiginleika okkar sjálfra – eða mannlega eiginleika – yfir á ímyndaða heiminn. Vættir þessa ímyndaða heims eru þannig séð tjáningarform og tilheyra þeim sagnaheimi sem við sköpum í þeim tilgangi að tjá okkur, í formi frásagnar, um hluti sem skipta okkur máli (sbr. Eremenko 2006, 217–22).

Þar sem óvinir mannsins eru, þegar upp er staðið, nokkurs konar mann-vættir, er þá ekki óhætt að segja að þær snúist í raun um hina eilífu glímu mannsins við sjálfan sig og aðra? Jafn auðveld og mannleg samskipti geta verið, geta þau líka verið erfið, og stundum svo að við kjósum að skilja ekki andstæðinga okkar. Þegar við skiljum ekki annað fólk, hættir okkur til að aðgreina það frá okkur sjálfum, jafnvel með því að telja okkur trú um að það sé ekki „mannlegt“ með sama hætti og við sjálf, heldur eitthvað annað, líkt og óvinveittar vættir. Það eitt að geta skilgreint óvini okkar á þennan hátt, auðveldar okkur að takast á við þá. Hið sama má einnig segja um niðurrifsöflin innra með okkur; þegar barn fær reiðiskast og við reynum að róa það niður og tala til þess á máli sem það skilur, getum við svo auðveldlega sagt: ekki láta púkann ná yfirhöndinni. Í sögum okkar eru tröll, risar, nornir, skrímsli og púkar niðurrífandi öfl og í grunninn

fjalla sögurnar um það hvernig þau eru brotin niður. Heimur hetjudáðanna er sá heimur þar sem fólk tekst á við ógnandi aðstæður og sigrar þær. Þar sem eðlilegt er að líta svo á að tröllin geti staðið fyrir mannlega eiginleika, þá endurspegla a.m.k. sum þeirra neikvæð, ógnvekjandi og niðurrífandi öfl í mannssálinni, og það er einmitt þess vegna sem glíman við þau er okkur svo mikilvæg (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 25).

Líkt og sögurnar bera með sér, getur það verið nauðsynlegt hverjum einstaklingi að hætta sér út að mörkum verndaðra svæða og takast á við vondar vættir. Okkur er þannig holt að mæta einhverju sem er stærra en við, einhverju sem hvetur okkur til að takast á við heiminn, og okkur sjálf í leiðinni. En í sögunum kemur einnig fram að þegar við gerum sjálfkrafa ráð fyrir því að einhver sé óvættur eða óvinveittur, þá getur sá hinn sami reynst vera góð vættur eða vinveittur, því að eins og fram kemur í þeim sögum þar sem vinátta myndast á milli hetju og tröllkonu, getur það eitt að takast á við tröll leitt til gæfu. Sú hetja sem heldur af stað í hættuför sína og hittir fyrir tröllkonu má því teljast heppin. Bregðist hún ekki við með ofbeldi og drepi tröllkonuna, heldur fari með henni inn í hellinn og kynnist henni, fær hún að launum þroska sem máli skiptir og dugar til að standa uppi sem sigurvegari.

Með því að velta fyrir okkur hlutverki trölla í fornaldarsögum, eðli þeirra og merkingu erum við í raun að reyna að skilja okkur sjálf. Og það er jafn mikilvægt að kannast við tröllið hið innra og hvað annað sem þar kann að búa. Í þeim tilgangi að breyta viðhorfi okkar til þessara vætta og sættast við þær, þurfum við að gera þær okkur vinveittar á sama hátt og hetjurnar vinguðust við Brönu, Gríði, Vargeisu og annars konar söguvættir, og gerðu þær að hjálpvættum sínum og andlegum styrkleika. Með átökum sínum við náttúruvættir sagnanna urðu hetjurnar vissulega að enn meiri mönnum og með sama hætti getur það einungis gert okkur að sterkari einstaklingum að sættast við okkar eigið eðli, eða það sem við hræðumst innra með okkur. Þegar betur er að gáð, er því alls ekki sjálfgefið að tröll séu hættuleg, a.m.k. getur stundum verið þess virði að láta reyna á vinskap þeirra; aðalmálið er að mæta þeim bara, með hugrekki, og samþykkja þau með því að hætta að einblína á útlitið, eins og Illugi Gríðarfóstri gerði fyrst þegar hann sá Gríði, og fara að einblína á hið sanna eðli þeirra, hjálpsemi og skyldleika þeirra við okkur sjálf. Það sem við getum lært af tröllunum er einmitt þetta: Rétt eins og við sjálf erum heilbrigð blanda af æðri og óæðri eiginleikum og kenndum eru óvinir okkar það líka. Öll erum við einhvers staðar á hinum gráa skala sem tilheyrir því einfaldlega að vera til, tröll eða ekki tröll.

## Að lokum

Í umfjölluninni hér að framan er stuðst við fjögur þemu sem varpa í sameiningu ljósi á hlutverk trölla í fornaldarsögum. Í sögunum standa tröllin fyrir lægra settan samfélagshóp og einkennast í rauninni af öllu því sem við viljum ekki vera sjálf. Í þessum skilningi eru tröllin eins konar jaðarfígúrur, bæði landfræðilega og samfélagslega séð. Þar að auki má segja að þau séu jaðarfígúrur innan heimsmyndar sagnanna og auðgi hinn tiltölulega þrönga heim þeirra, þar sem ákveðin lögmál gilda. Með því að stíga út fyrir hinn fyrirfram skilgreinda ramma og inn í heim tröllanna

stækkar heimsmyndin og túlkunarmöguleikum fjölgar. Í sögunum er sjónum þó sérstaklega beint að kvenkyns tröllum, sem verða þá oftar en ekki fulltrúar kynbundinna fordóma. Viðhorfið til þessara kvenna er þó ekki alls staðar það sama og sé það jákvætt, geta þær stuðlað að þroska þeirra karlhetja sem til þeirra leita. Tröllkonan er því þegar upp er staðið *það sem hún er í huga hvers og eins*. Þessi hugmynd kemur hvað best fram í vísu eftir Braga hinn gamla skáld, eftir því sem frá segir í Snorra-Eddu (Finnur Jónsson 1931, 165). Vísan segir frá því þegar Bragi ók um skóg nokkurn síðla kvölds og hittir þar fyrir konu. Konan segir Braga að fólk kalli sig tröll og spyr hann svo í kjölfarið: Hvað er tröll, nema það?

**Heimildir**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# BORROWING THE BIG KETTLE: A SCANDINAVIAN FOLK LEGEND

Bengt af Klintberg*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Magnús Grímsson visited Rangárvallasýsla in southern Iceland where he wrote down a text based on tales from several informants. This text was included in Jón Árnason's *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* with the title "Gissur from Botnar." It begins with a number of topographic details, including an account of a ravine called *Tröllkonuhlaup* ('Troll Woman Ravine'). High mountains line the ravine, and one of them was home to a troll woman. In a mountain on the other side of the ravine lived her sister.

In the summer, the farmers in the neighbourhood often travelled to this place to fish and gather grass from the pasture. One of them was the farm master of Botnar called Gissur. Once he felt that he had caught enough fish, he set off towards home. When he was between two of the high mountains he heard a terrifying exchange between the mountains:

"Sister, lend me your kettle!"
"What do you want it for?"
"To boil a man."
"Who is he?"
"Gissur from Botnar, Gissur from Lækjarbotnar."

At the same moment Gissur looked up towards one of the mountains and saw the sister who wanted to boil him coming rushing towards him. He understood that his life was hanging by a fine thread, and he rode towards his farm as fast as he could. He heard the troll woman huffing and puffing behind him, but he managed to reach the Klofi farm where the people rang the church bells and thereby saved his life. Infuriated by his

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escape, the troll woman threw her axe towards Gissur. It hit the horse that staggered down dead as it entered the courtyard. The sound of the bells led the troll woman to go insane, and she was found dead in the ravine some days later – the ravine which has been called *Tröllkonuhlaup* ever since (Jón Árnason 1862, 160–63).

In *Þjóðsögur og æfintýri* the legend is followed by a shorter version collected by the Rev. Skúli Gíslason, who was a parson in Rangárvallasýsla at that time (Jón Árnason 1862, 163–64). He was, as Terry Gunnell has shown in his article "Clerics as Collectors of Folklore in Nineteenth-Century Iceland," one of several clerics who sent their folklore records to Jón Árnason (Gunnell 2012, 52ff.). The legend is known under the name "Borrowing the Big Kettle," and the two records come from the utmost periphery of the area where the legend is distributed, its centre being Norway and Sweden. It is very well-known in these countries and can be found in 170 Swedish and Norwegian records. The Norwegian ones are from all over Norway, except for the three northernmost provinces. The Swedish ones also have a wide distribution and are missing only in some provinces in the south and east.

A folk legend from the Scandinavian peninsula that reached Iceland and – as I will soon demonstrate – also an English-speaking area with connections to Scandinavia, seems a fitting subject for my homage to a dear folklorist colleague, Terry Gunnell. But there is another reason for my choice of topic. During my twenty years of teaching folklore at Stockholm University, I supervised many students as they wrote their Bachelor's dissertations. In retrospect, one of these dissertations stands out as far more ambitious than all the others. It is an independent and inventive 167-page legend monograph, followed by 18 pages of maps and illustrations. It was written in Swedish and given the title "Sägnen om kittellånet" [The Legend of the Kettle-Loan], and I have long since believed that it should be better known beyond the Swedish borders.

The name of the author is Sven Olof Norman (1935–2020). He was an artist by profession, a well-established painter with a personal pictorial world, often of the landscape and traditional environments in his home province. At a mature age, he became interested in folklore and after several years as a student at our department, he submitted his dissertation in the spring semester of 1978. The legend of the borrowed kettle was familiar to him since his youth in his home parish of Ragunda, eastern Jämtland.

When I wrote this article I made great use of Sven Olof Norman's fundamental research on the kettle loan legend, especially his thorough account of variations in those motifs making up the plot. However, the interpretations of the age and development of the legend and its relation to official and unofficial sets of rules are my own.

As could be expected, the legend of the kettle loan is included in the two catalogues that record the legend tradition on the Scandinavian Peninsula. Reidar Th. Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends* gives the legend type number 5000 and the title "Trolls Resent a Disturbance." The plot is summarised as follows:

> A certain person was constantly fishing in a lake (A1) or doing some work in the open (A2), without having a license (A2a), or being always late at night (A2b), and was even working on Sundays (A2c) and at Christmas (A2d), or at every season of the year (A2e). In the end, two

trolls intervened (B) whose names are given as: Hammar i Halle and Klinkannes Skalle (B1), or some persons impersonating trolls (B2), and the following dialogue was heard (C): May I borrow your big cauldron? (C1); for what use? (C2); to boil… who… (C3); Yes, if I may have the scrapings (C4); No, in that case I would rather roast him over the coals (C5). This puts an end to the fishing or the work (D).

Christiansen's description starts with some source references, the first of which requires commenting: "Mediaeval. Uhland Kl. Schr., VIII, p. 434; Vit. St. Galli." Christiansen dated the legend as medieval as a legend motif reminiscent of the kettle loan can be found in the hagiography *Vita Sancti Galli* from the eleventh century. It has been addressed by Ludwig Uhland in volume VIII of his *Schriften zur Geschichte der Dichtung und Sage*, and it describes a dialogue of two giants over the Lake Constance, where they complain that they have been disturbed by the church bells (Liungman 1961, 416). Later in this article, I will argue that the legend of the kettle loan might very well originate from the medieval period, however the passage in *Vita Sancti Galli* does not provide enough evidence to support this, especially as shouts from supernatural beings are a well-known element of legends, not the least in the Scandinavian countries (e.g. types E1, E27, J51, K62, K81 and K92 in my catalogue *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* [TSFL]).

There are two versions of the kettle-loan legend. The first involves two supernatural beings, either giants or trolls, frightening a man with their dialogue. In the second, two farmhands play the role of giants or trolls. Our legend is recorded in TSFL as type K61 with the title "Borrowing the Big Kettle," but the plots of the two versions are shown separately:

**K61A. Trolls want to boil man who works after sunset**.
A farmer (often called Lars Långlår ['Long-thigh']) who works in the fields after sunset hears a troll shouting to another troll that he wants to borrow his big kettle. "Why?" asks the other troll. "To cook Lars Långlår who does not go home in the evening." (Parts of the cooked body are promised as compensation for the loan). The man becomes afraid and goes home.

The references show that the legend has been distributed throughout western and northern Sweden. Instances are missing from the provinces of Skåne, Blekinge, Öland, Gotland and Närke in the south and east. The other version shows roughly the same pattern of distribution:

**K61B. Two farmhands act as trolls**.
Two farmhands want to frighten their master (Lars Långlår) who forces them to work late in the evening. (Two farmers want to frighten the lady of a castle, Rangela, who takes high duties.) Standing on two mountaintops they act as trolls. One of them shouts to the other that he wants to borrow his big kettle. "Why?" "To cook Lars Långlår who does not go home in the evening." (To cook Rangela who takes too high duties).

There is little evidence of this legend beyond the Scandinavian peninsula. With the exception of Jón Árnason's records from Iceland, there is one record from Shetland and

four brief accounts from Jutland. Just as in the Icelandic version, the Shetlandic version is connected to a placename – "Saxie's Kettle" – a large basin in the rocks near Norwick, where the tide rises into this 'kettle' from below. The water bubbles and simmers, giving the impression that it is piping hot. This kettle belonged to the giant Saxie, who lived on the eastern side of Burrafirth. Another giant, Herman, lived on the western side of the fjord:

> Once Herman asked the loan of the kettle in which to boil an ox. Saxie said he would lend it if Herman would go halves in the ox. Says Herman: "I'll radder reeve rüt as gie da half o'it" ('I rather tear it raw than give you half of it'). Then Saxie replied: "Come do wer daal and link and I'll gie de dy liver-drink." (Saxby 1932, quoted from Norman 1978, 24).

Two of the Jutlandic records are similar to the Shetlandic version, in that rather than boiling a human, the supernatural beings want to boil an animal, in the Jutlandic versions the farmer's grey horse. One of these records recalls a farmer ploughing a slope leading into a mountain, which the mountain people cannot tolerate. Consequently, the man loses a horse every year:

> Once some fishermen who lived along the lake were out fishing. They heard the wife of the mountain man shout to her neighbour in Vrold mark, asking if she can borrow the big kettle. "Yes, what do you want it for?" she asked. The other answered "to boil Troels' grey horse." Troels was the man who would lose a horse each year. The fishermen returned home to farmer Troels, telling him he must bring his grey horse home, otherwise it will be boiled by the mountain people (Kristensen 1980, no. 267).

The version quoted above does not explicitly mention whether the farmer succeeded to save his horse, and in another version, he loses it (Kristensen 1980, no. 273). The two remaining variants from Jutland are short legends in which a sieve-maker and a pedlar hear a voice calling for a kettle (Kristensen 1980, no. 1292, 1293). The same professions appear in similar short versions from southern Sweden (Norman 1978, 147).

The fact that several variants come from areas in the western periphery of the legend, Iceland, Shetland and Jutland, makes it likely that the origin of the legend can be found in Norway. It is true that the legend has had an even wider distribution in Sweden than in Norway, but it does not seem to have reached Finnish tradition; no information about it is given in Marjatta Jauhiainen's catalogue of Finnish legends (Jauhiainen 1998). Nevertheless, there are two fragmentary records from Swedish-speaking Finland, both belonging to the subtype where farmhands play the role of trolls (Wessman 1928, no. 901(1): 971).

It should be noted that the giants or mountain people in the Shetlandic variant as well as in the two Jutlandic ones do not want to use the kettle to boil a human, rather a domestic animal; in the Shetlandic version an ox, in the two from Jutland a grey horse. This motif does not appear in any of the versions from the Scandinavian peninsula. My interpretation is that the records in the western periphery of the distribution area represent an early form of the legend, which has in Norway and Sweden been

superseded by a considerably more dramatic form, where the domestic animal has been replaced by a human. I base this interpretation on an observation presented in Max Lüthi's article, "Urform und Zielform in Sage und Märchen" (1967). He has noted how the storytellers often strove to improve the content of their narratives in order to make them more dramatic or entertaining. This ambition led to changes, but the changes ceased once the plot reached its optimal form, its 'Zielform.' In the legend about the kettle loan this 'Zielform' seems to have originated in Norway and then spread over almost all of the Scandinavian peninsula.

But where in Norway? Here Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends* delivers important information. The catalogue accounts for 47 variants of legend type ML 5000 (a number that probably could be increased through further inquiry). A clear majority of the variants from the southern parts of Norway, found under the headings 'Eastern Norway,' 'Telemark' and 'Southern Norway,' contain the motif that the man is out on a fishing tour when he hears the shouting voices. Further north in the country, in the parts that are accounted for under the headings 'Western Norway' and 'Tröndelag,' the late work of the man takes place in a field, a forest, a bog where he is mowing grass or some other non-maritime place. Christiansen has no proof of the legend from the parts of Norway furthest north.

In the Swedish variants, only six of 123 mention the events taking place during a fishing trip (Norman 1978, 151ff.). Most often the man is said to be working in an outlying field, a forest, or a bog where he is busy cutting grass. There can be no doubt that the version involving fishing is older than the one taking place on dry land. It is also worth noting that the Icelandic version, like the one from Jutland, belongs to the 'fishing' version, which strengthens the impression that they spread from Norway before the non-maritime version had become the most widespread.

Why this change from a maritime to an agrarian environment? Once again we can refer to Lüthi's thoughts about a tendency of traditional narratives becoming more dramatic and visual over time. The legend's topography is less than optimal when the action takes place during a fishing excursion; fishing waters are not usually surrounded by high mountains. The Swedish versions clearly reflect the importance of the topography. The legend has had difficulties in finding a suitable framing in the flatlands of southern Sweden, however, it has become very popular in the Northern upland.

Let us take a closer look at some representative texts. The oldest Norwegian variant of the kettle-loan legend was recorded in the 1840s in Telemark by the clergyman and poet M. B. Landstad, better known as the publisher of the first authentic collection of Norwegian medieval ballads. The record is included in his *Ættesagaer og Sagn fra Telemarken* which was published after his death. It is representative of the tradition in southern Norway, apart from the last paragraph that is missing in other variants and seems to have been added by Landstad. He likely did this to make the tale more similar to the *Ættesagaer*, long family legends that he wrote down influenced by Icelandic saga literature:

At the same time there lived a man, whom some call Lars Langomlår ('Lars Long-thigh'), others Olaf Lange or Olaf Fiskar ('Fisher'). He was lying by a water in Heien where he was fishing. He had made himself a cabin close by where he would spend the night and hide the fish. The water where he fished was situated in a narrow valley, surrounded by steep mountains. One evening, as he sat in his cabin, frying some fish for his dinner, he heard a frightening howl from the mountain. He started to listen and heard the following conversation echo between the mountains:

"Hámar in Helle, Hámar in Helle!"
"What do you want me, you flinting Skelle?"
"Can I borrow your kettle?"
"What do you want it for?"
"I want to boil Olaf Lange who never leaves the water."
"Yes, but can I have the blood?"
"No, as I will fry him over the embers."

But then Olaf Lange did not want to hear more; he took to his legs as fast as he could and ran in such a way that he damaged his both legs severely. Since he knew that Johannes of the Valley was not far away, he sought refuge with him and told him what had happened. Johannes said he should be ashamed to be so easily frightened and lose all his fish, and he encouraged him to go back to the water and promised him brotherhood and protection on the condition that they would both share their surplus fish with the poor for as long as there was a famine. Olaf agreed, and there is nothing to say that the trolls caused trouble for him again. This would not have been easy for them, because now he was under the protection of God.

In a footnote Landstad gives an alternative to the answer of the troll when he is asked what he wants the kettle for: "I want to boil Lars Langomlár who comes here to fish both in the autumn and the spring." (Landstad 1924, 222)

It is obvious that the names of the characters in the legend have captured the listeners' imaginations. A storyteller with a talent for drama would well be able to enact the sounds of the giants as they shout to each other. As my earlier examples have shown, the names of the giants or trolls are 'Hammar i Hälle' and 'Klinkannes Skalle' with variations. The name of the hard-working man is 'Lars långlår' or related forms. Records with these names are found in a large cohesive area comprising the major parts of Norway and Sweden. The Swedish versions with these names have reached as far north as Lapland; however, they are missing in the southernmost part of the Swedish distribution area.

The close connection between the variants in Norway and Sweden may be illustrated by some selected examples. According to Christiansen's catalogue, the name of the giant or troll first being called upon is 'Hammar i Halle,' in Landstad's record 'Hámar i Helle.' Generally, the same name appears in some 30 variants from western and northern Sweden (Värmland, Hälsingland, Härjedalen, Jämtland, Ångermanland, Västerbotten, Lapland).

The name of his neighbour, the owner of the kettle, shows more variation. Christiansen's catalogue mentions 'Klinkannes Skalle,' and in Landstad's record he is

called 'flintandes Skelle.' Examples from Sven Olof Norman's study include 'Storflinten på Berge' (Hälsingland), 'Svinkom Bärge' (Härjedalen), 'Koppar i Skalle' (Jämtland), 'Storklingeriskalla' (Ångermanland) and 'Klang Kling Kopparskalle' (Västerbotten).

According to Christiansen's catalogue, the man who awakens the disapproval of the two giants or trolls through his activities late in the day goes by names such as 'Lars Langlår,' 'Lars Langumlår' and 'Ola Langerilår.' Similarly, his Swedish names often refer to his long legs: 'Lars Langerlår' (Värmland), 'Jan Linkenilår' (Bohuslän), 'Per Skinkelår' (Dalsland), 'Lars Långomlår' (Uppland), 'Lars Långerben' (Dalarna), and 'Långbent-Ivar' (Ångermanland).

The names appear regularly in texts recounting the tradition during the nineteenth century. However, since older instances are missing, we do not know if they are an original component of the legend. The fact that they are missing in peripheral parts of the distribution area could be interpreted to mean that there have been older forms where these names did not yet exist. Then, at some point in the early modern period, a creative storyteller gave the three characters the imaginative names that have since dominated.

I have not found 'Hammar i Hälle' used as a troll or giant name in other legends. In Norwegian and Swedish, the words 'Hammar' and 'hammare' (En. 'hammer') respectively are used to refer to the tool but they are also well-documented names of a steep mountain formation or a mountainous hill in the landscape. The same is valid for 'hall' and 'häll' (En. 'slab') that have been used for larger, bare (perpendicular) parts of a mountain. Thus, we see that the names of the trolls or giants are consciously associated with stone and rocks. Not only do their names signify the mountains in which they live, the giants also characterise themselves as being big, hard and heavy like the mountains. In addition, the metals hidden in the mountains may be a part of the name, as is the case with 'kopparskalle' (En. 'copper skull').

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The oldest Swedish version of the kettle-loan legend was recorded in September 1646 by a 24-year-old clergyman-to-be, Petrus Magni Gyllenius during travel in Kila parish in the province of Värmland. He and his travel companions passed the ruins of Ed castle, erected in the fourteenth century, and situated near a sound. There, they were told the story of the last lady to have lived in the castle. Her name was Rangela, and she had drowned near the sound during a storm that caused her boat to capsize. When the farmers in the area heard about this, they burned down the castle. They did so as Lady Rangela had charged them an unreasonably high toll whenever they passed the castle in their boats. There was also a story of what had made her leave the castle:

> One part states that two farmers went out at night; one of them sat down on the Edsbonden mountain, and the other on a mountain just near the castle. One shouted to the other, "Neighbour, lend me your kettle." The other answered: "What do you want it for?" Then he responded, "To boil lady Rangela of Ed castle, for the tolls she takes from the poor are too high." The neighbour answered, "Oh yes, you may gladly receive my kettle, but boil her well."

> When the lady heard this, she became frightened, took to flight and left for Västergötland. But when she came out on the Årsfjord, she departed at the Rangela sound, which later received her name.
> (Gardberg and Toijer 1962, 86)

The legend about Lady Rangela (in some variants told about Queen Åsa) has only been distributed locally in south-western Värmland. It can be noted that it belongs to subtype no. K61B in the Swedish legend catalogue, where two farmhands (or in this instance, two farmers) play the role of two terrifying giants. This subtype has been popular in both Norway and Sweden; Sven Olof Norman's study shows that the number of records belonging to this subtype is bigger than that of the one that seems to be the original, 63 versus 60 (Norman 1978, 40).

The explanation for its popularity must be that the plot in this form has become an expression of social criticism. When the two farmers force Lady Rangela to flee they also put an end to unreasonable tolls that she has forced the people to pay when passing her castle. The farmers have not, as in legends about peasant uprisings, taken up arms, rather they have used their cunning and imagination. The story has taken on a different characteristic to those where the listeners can live the fear of the main character when hearing the frightening voices of the giants. Here, they can instead identify with the two farmers who play the role of giants. What was originally a narrative about frightening beings that surround humans has become a trickster story.

But is it really impossible that the subtype about two men acting as giants is, as a matter of fact, the original? After all, the legend of Lady Rangela is the oldest on record, approximately two hundred years older than Landstad's version from the days of romanticism. Yes, I would say it is impossible. The version about the troll or giant who wants to borrow a kettle from another troll or giant is a necessary prerequisite for the trickster version, and the distribution picture with versions from Iceland, Shetland and Jutland indicate that it existed long before the seventeenth century. However, the fact that the B-type has become so popular sheds an interesting light on the social environment in which it has been told. It is an environment with rich folklore about hard masters and miserly mistresses. The B-type follows a familiar pattern for how servants could express their feelings.

The central message is that there are times during which a person must not work, and this message existed before the appearance of the B-type and is expressed in many records. The fourth of God's Ten Commands observed in Christian tradition goes: Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. There are a great number of legends describing how violations of the fourth commandment are punished, often in a supernatural way: people or objects turn into stone, people or buildings sink into the ground (for Swedish examples, see types B61–94 in TSFL). In 47 of the Swedish versions, the action takes place late on a Saturday evening or on another holy day (Norman 1978, 151–54). There can be no doubt that many storytellers have conceived the farmer's late work as a breach of the Sabbath. However, it must also be stated that the motif above all appears in versions from northern Sweden and cannot therefore be the primary ingredient in the legend. During the nineteenth century, extensive migration took place

from Värmland – a province bordering southern Norway – to Hälsingland and other northern provinces where the sawmill industry offered employment. In these provinces, the revivalist movements were successful, which may explain why the breach of the Sabbath became an attractive motif in the plot.

On second thought, it appears illogical that giants and trolls, creatures that exist outside the Christian community and often in opposition to it, should be the ones that react against a person's breach of the Sabbath. This motif can hardly be original, even if it has had a strong impact on the narrative tradition. Beside the official Christian prohibition against work on the day of rest, there has also been an unofficial popular tradition that work is to be avoided at certain times, especially at night. The explanation has been that such work disturbs the supernatural creatures that inhabit nature around human population. In 43 Swedish variants of the legend, the time of the events is not specified in detail other than "an evening," "a late evening" or "a night" (Norman 1978, 95f., 151–54). These variants are from provinces bordering Norway, particularly Värmland, which allows us to draw the conclusion that it is this folk belief that is reflected in the legend.

A German doctoral thesis on work prohibitions gives several examples of the folk belief that supernatural creatures oppose work such as grinding in a watermill after nightfall or spinning after midnight (Treutlein 1932, 39). The most well-known folk legend on this theme is that somebody on a late evening meets a supernatural creature who says: "The day is yours, the night is mine." (Type J91 in TSFL). Most of my examples are from Sweden, but the legend has also been documented in German-speaking areas (Zingerle 1891, no. 314). Sometimes the plot is very simple, as in the record from the province of Dalsland, made by Richard Dybeck in the 1840s:

> A wife was sitting outdoors late in the evening with a needlework. The giant came out from the mountain to her, saying "Anna, go indoors, the day is yours, the night is mine." The wife went inside. After that she was fortunate with her cattle. (Dybeck 1843, 40)

In a southern Swedish version from 1693 of the so-called 'Woman Hunt Legend' (type D4 in TSFL), a night wanderer meets Wodan who comes riding with a dead woman draped in front of him on his horse. He says: "The day is yours, and the night is mine. If I find you out in the night once more, you shall die." (Tuneld 1960, 143)

In conclusion, it can be stated that the remark 'medieval' in Christiansen's *The Migratory Legends* is probably quite correct, even if there was never a connection between the kettle loan legend and the hagiography *Vita Sancti Galli* from the eleventh century. The folk belief about the danger of staying out in nature after nightfall no doubt existed in the Nordic countries before the Christian commandment of the sanctity of the day of rest reached them. What remains to be commented upon is why Sven Olof Norman was able to find so many Swedish versions of the kettle-loan legend, more than double the amount in Norway, the country where the legend appears to originate. The explanation is that he was not the first person to take interest in the legend; it had earlier caught Carl Herman Tillhagen's attention. Tillhagen's plans to write about it were never realised, but in 1940 he sent out a questionnaire that was answered by many of the informants of

the Nordic Museum. The name of the special questionnaire no. 79 from that year is something we will recognise: "*Hi, ho, Hammer i Hälle*!" (Kjellström 1995, 84)

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# THE INCUBUS, THE ELVES AND THE FALLEN ANGELS: NATURE-SPIRITS AND NIGHTMARES

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In the *South English Legendary* – written in Southwest England in the later 13C – the writer readily connects fallen angels, incubi and elves, seeing them all as linked to the world of dreams:

> Both the bad and the good [spirits] often alight down / And come to men in sleep and in a vision / And show them in dreams many a wondrous deed [thing] / But the good [spirits show men visions] of good things and the bad ever of bad [things] / And [they] often harm men in sleep and announce sorrow and care / And often they lie upon men, which men call the [night]mare… / Usually they oppress goodmen as they lie down [asleep]…/ So that he shall not move hand or foot nor scarcely draw a breath / Curst be such an evil chamberlain that waketh men so painfully.
> (lines 223–31, 234–35)[1]

So far, though good angels may bring good dreams, the text is describing a nightmare demon. Then the action turns sexual. The *eluene* [elves] are brought into play – singly and in multiple – and identified as "those taken out of heaven:"

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[1] "Boþe þe luþer & þe gode aliȝteþ ofte adoun / And to men in slepe comþ and in auision / And sseweþ hom in metinge moni a wonder dede / Ac þe gode of gode þinge & þe luþer euere of quede / And derieþ ofte men in slep & bodieþ sorwe & care / And ofte hi of liggeþ men þat me clupeþ þe mare… / Mest hi greueþ selimen wanne hi liggeþ upriȝt / Op hom hi liggeþ heuie inou nere hi nere so liȝt… / Hi of liggeþ as an heui stok as hi wolde a man astoffe / Þat he ne ssel wawy fot ne hond ne vnneþe enes poffe / Dai þat such luþer chamberlein þat awakeþ men so sore." (1956, II:409). I thank Joseph Harris, Harvard University, for help with translating lines 223–8 (p.c. 4th Nov. 2018). The *Legendary* is in a distinct SW English dialect with signs of very early Old Norse contact (Kobayashi 1964); probably written in Gloucester, where Celtic England borders Celtic Wales (Roman-Dubonni city, in Anglo-Saxon Mercia, later Wessex, under Norman control from 1066). On the MSS, Hall 2004, 141.

> The evil creatures desire also at other times to betray mankind / alight down in human form by night and by day / and lie often with women as though they were of flesh and blood… / And often in woman's form, in the day and also night / they let men lie with them and betray them outright / for they know which are the men who have desire of folly / Alone in some hidden place they stand then very quiet/still, / and many a fool lies with them thus, in the wood and in the meadow. / But there is none who does so that does not suffer from the deed… / And often in the form of woman on many a hidden path / men see a great company of them both dance and play / that are called *eluene*… / And by day they are often in the wood, and by night upon high hills / [They] are from among the wretched spirits who/which were taken out of heaven…
> (lines 239–57)[2]

I was thinking about some of the issues raised by this passage in relation to Terry Gunnell's comments on the histories of elves, *álfar* and the hidden folk, and his discussions of supernatural encounters in the liminal zones of seashore, night and wilderness (Gunnell 2007; 2017; 2020).

Gunnell (2007; 2020) argues that the Eddic *álfar* are partially synonymous with the Vanir, having little or nothing in common with latter-day 'small spirits' (Raudvere 1995; Nygaard 2022). Hutton and others come to similar conclusions for the 'elf⇒fairy' traditions of the British Isles, except there the movement is somewhat the other way around: the *ælfen* of the Anglo-Saxon and Old English world – initially classed among other kinds of nature-spirit – rise up in the period following the *Legendary* to become the courtly elven queens, knights and ladies of Romance.[3] Anglo-Saxons using the cures in their Leechbooks – *remedies for every witch and elvish influence*[4] – evidently distinguished certain conditions related to *ælf*-entities from those involving demons, though they used many of the same herbs against both.[5] The incubus – the one with the clearest classical

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[2] "Þe ssrewen wolleþ ek oþerwile mankunne to bitraie / Aliȝ te adoun in monnes forme bini ȝ te & bidaie / And liggeþ ofte bi wymmen as hi were of fleiss & blode… / And ofte in forme of womman aday and eke niȝt / Hi leteþ men hom ligge bi and bitraieþ hom outriȝt / For hi weteþ wuch beoþ men þat to folie habbeþ wille / Al one in som deorne stude hi stondeþ þanne wel stille / And mani fol hom liþ so by in wode and eke in mede / Ac þer nis non þat so deþ þat ne acoreþ þe dede / And ofte in forme of womman in moni deorne weie / Me sicþ of hom gret companie boþe hoppe & pleie / Þat eleuene beoþ icluped… / And bi daie muche in wode beoþ & biniȝte upe heie doune / Þat beoþ of þe wrecche gostes þat of heuene were inome… (1956, II:409–10).

[3] Hutton (2014, 1136–38) lists key literature on this; see also: Larrington 1999; Henderson and Cowan 2001; Ostling and Forest 2014; Green 2016.

[4] Contents page of Bald's Leechbook I (mid-10C, Winchester), ff. 5r–5v: *Laecedomas wip aelcre leodrunan y aelfsidenne paet is fefercynnes gealdor / dust / drencas / sealf / gif sio adl netnum sie. / gif sio adl wyrde mannan odde mare ride / wyrde seofon ealles craefta* ('Remedies for every witch and elvish influence, that is, an incantation for a kind of fever, and powder and drinks and salve, and if disease is affecting livestock. And if a disease injures a person or a *mære* rides and injures [a person]; seven remedies in all…' transl. in Hall 2004, 123; cf. Hall 2007a, 124; Batten 2021, 36.

[5] On these distinctions, Kesling 2020, Ch. 2–3, and 69–70 for tabulation of herbs related to elves and demons; one is *ælfþone*, mentioned e.g. in the Nine Herb metrical charm (*Lacnunga*, BL Harley 585, late 10C–early 11C), cf. Roper 2005, 29–30. Hall (2004, 96–97) comments: "the implication [is] that Anglo-Saxons deliberately consumed parts of a plant called *ælfþone* in search of mind-altering experiences [and] *ælfþone* [was] prescribed [in] Old English medical texts to help cure states of fever or madness."

pedigree – has few early medieval attestations in the North, and thereafter appears mainly in medical or demonological texts (cf. e.g. van der Lugt 1999, 175–200; Knight 2019, 37–60; Batten 2021).

Between the early and the high Middle Ages, there was little consensus about the powers and place of 'natural' spirits in the human universe. How 'natural' are fallen angels, in comparison with the dryad-like *eluene*, or nightmare-demons? These three categories of being were all glossed as nature-spirits by different authors at various times; which is to say they were identified with, and situated in, specific natural habitats, such as air, water, forest. The interesting thing about the passage in the *Legendary* is that it characterises bad angels, incubi and elves by locality – the dream-bearing spirits 'alight' (i.e. from the air), *eluene* reside in wilderness – but it also ties together all three by associating them with dreams and altered states of mind (ASM).[6] Some perhaps surprising patterns emerge, when, following this clue, we consider these entities as related in terms of dreams and dream-cultures;[7] specifically, in terms of desire-filled dreams: oneiric experiences turning around fear, violence and passion.

Here I explore some common elements which recur in North Atlantic medieval and folkloric sources, in and around the British archipelago, to suggest that the wider dimension which matters in the entangled roles of elf, incubus and fallen angel is how they were used to configure otherworldly encounters ruled by desire. These elements are: first, the issue of hybrid-form; these spirits are either monstrous or double-natured in some way. Second, the relevance of number: the distinctions made between solo and multiple beings. Third – and related to this last – their typical actions: the solo spirit attacks or lures; the multiple ones ride, dance or fight as a horde. In the first case, the central issue is penetration (desire for, or fear of it); in the second and third, physical commotion functions both as a stand-in for mental commotion, and as a means of representing the boundary-breach of otherworldly contact.

Let us start first by defining some terms, then sketch the relation of each configuration to the realm of dreams, fantasy and the imagination, bringing in our various foci – hybrid beings, number, characteristic action – as we go along.

## Fallen Angels

Folk traditions across Northwest Europe absorbed the *interpretatio christiana*, which explained morally ambivalent nature-spirits as fallen angels; often as angels which did not take sides in Lucifer's great rebellion. In the *Voyages of St Brendan* (10C+, many versions and languages), for example, the saint and his monks visit an island of neutral angels, who look like lords and ladies, but shapeshift into birds on Sundays and holy

[6] For ASM definitions and background, see e.g. Sluhovsky 2011; Ustinova 2011; Milne 2024, Intro., Ch. 1, 5; cf. Milne 2025 (on waterwoman encounters), and Milne, forthcoming (on Norse and Celtic desire-filled dreams).

[7] Dream-culture in this sense means the common repertoire of lore, cosmology, imagery, tales etc., which defines otherworldly entities, places and experiences, and on which a person draws to construct personal dreams; see e.g. Milne 2007, Ch. 1; 2024, Intro., Ch. 2, 6–7; cf. Schmitt 1999, 274–75.

days. An apparently independent Germanic tradition produced the 12C Middle Dutch version, *Des Reis van Sint Brandaen*, wherein these angels are visualized rather as *Walscheranden*; furious, monstrous and warlike:

> They had boars' heads and teeth like wolves, human hands but dogs' legs, human bodies, but long necks like cranes. They wore silk clothing above their shaggy legs. They were all screaming at once and holding in their hands drawn bows with sharp arrows in them. They had long beards and growled like bears.[8]

Initially terrifying, they too turn out to be gentle hosts, and, like the bird-lord-angels, they hope to get back into Heaven come Judgement Day. By the time of the earliest illustration (cf. Fig. 1, 1460), they are represented even more strangely, and against the text, with fishtails, as if they were mer-beings.

The Church Fathers variously regarded fallen angels as consigned to Hell – or to 'the dark air' – or to zones of the natural world.[9] According to St Anthony, *Great is their number in the air around us… they are not far from us* [and] *there are great distinctions among them…*[10] Typologically, their Fall was paired with the Expulsion from Eden (as in Fig. 2). Gunnell comments on "the medieval church's deliberate attempt to equate all popular nature spirits with demons or fallen angels, an idea reflected in numerous *exempla*-based folk legends found all over the Nordic area."[11] In Ireland also, the rebel angels *fell on the earth. They fell on the rooftops. They fell in the water*. In Shetland, those who fell with the 'Son o' the Moarnin' became sea and land *trows* ('trolls') (Wilde 1887, 208–15; Bruford 1997, 121). As they occupy different niches in the ecosphere, so do they also in the oneiric sphere, as we will see.

Patristic authors explained all Old Testament texts as allegories of the New, while understanding the Bible itself as a manual for behaviour. Thus they deciphered (or enciphered) the fall of the angels as a coded representation of the individual's interior struggles with sin.[12] The great forgers of Christian theology around the Mediterranean were clear that demons relied on illusion and delusion, and therefore could only injure men through a failure of human free will. These authorities thus all helped to move fallen angels into the terrain of the imagination and human desire; that is, into dream-culture. Athanasius's description of demons attacking Anthony at night stresses their hallucinatory and chaotic qualities:

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[8] *The Voyage of St Brendan*, 125. Cf. Strijbosch 1994, 195–96. On neutral fallen angels, Dando 1980; Newman 2018; Milne 2007, Ch. 1; 2024, Ch. 7.

[9] See e.g. *Clementine Homilies* 8.12–18, 9.10; Bamberger 2006, 61–86, summarises these Patristic views.

[10] *Vita S. Antoni* 21. On the *Vita*, best known in Latin translation by Evagrius Ponticus of Antioch (c. 371): Dutschke 1994, 501; Beresford 2019, 1081. On "demons of the lower air," Rampton, 2021, 63–84.

[11] Gunnell (2007, 128, n. 79) quotes a late 19C Danish example: "when the Lord expelled the fallen angels from heaven, they fell on the earth and became the troll folk… some fell on rooftops and became *nisse*, some fell in the water and became water sprites…"

[12] Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–c. 50), *De Gigantibus* II:iv.17 (re Genesis 6.2), for example, interprets angels lying with the Daughters of Men as: "evil ones who, cloaking themselves under the name of angels, know not the daughters of right reason, the sciences and virtues, but court the pleasures which are born of men…"

> That night… It was *as though* demons burst through the four walls of the little chamber… in the forms of beasts… the place was filled with the *phantoms* of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, serpents [and] wolves; each moved according to its *assumed shape*… The lion roared ready to spring upon him, the bull *appeared* about to gore him, the serpent writhed without quite reaching him, the wolf was rushing straight at him… the *apparitions* emitted *frightful noises*… the *fury* shown was fierce. [Antony] as if to mock them [said]: "…you are trying *to scare me out of my wits by your numbers*. It is a sign of your helplessness, that *you ape the forms of brutes*"…[13] [emphasis added]

The mid-14C Norse version, *Antonius saga*, renders this as follows:

> [that] night… the demons [attacked] with such a great clamour and terrifying storm that it might seem as if his chamber, the mountain [mound?] and the earth itself would be completely overset by the terrible shaking. …The little chamber then began pretty much to fall apart… the unclean spirits came into Anthony's view in the shapes of various beasts of the forest… lions and leopards… bears, adders… *Reguli* [basilisks?]… All of these monsters went roaring, …with gaping jaws... [But Anthony said]: "[you cannot] scare me… with visions and fear of many-shaped monsters... it is the greatest mark of your powerlessness that some of you are in animal form and appearance…"[14]

The tomb in which Anthony is living is translated as *haugr* ('burial mound'), which is where the Norse would expect to encounter spirits and ghosts (cf. Chadwick 1946). Notably, Athanasius's demons take the forms of (natural) animal predators; the Norse glosses them rather as *margmynduð skrímsl* ('many-shaped monsters').

This detail also serves to position Anthony's vision more clearly as a kind of nightmare, as well as a mass-demonic attack. Like all angels, good and bad, demons were usually represented as hybrid in form.[15] Nature-spirits and other otherworldly creatures could be either part-animal (like classical fauns and satyrs), or capable of taking more than one shape like selkies and mermaids (cf. Milne 2024, Ch. 3). Since at least the time of Macrobius (370–430), visually hybrid imagery was associated with the nightmare (*phantasma*; Milne 2007, Ch. 1; 2011; 2024, Intro., Ch. 3, 5). Freud too saw 'hybrid' or distorted imagery as characteristic of dreams, caused by processes of condensation and displacement, and driven by (unconscious) desire (Freud 1953, 381–419; cf. Milne 2024, Intro., Ch. 2). These two aspects are distinct, though related. Dream-distortion is the umbrella category. Everyone experiences distortion, in Freud's sense, in dream-imagery – through the fusion and shuffling of memory – without necessarily

[13] *Vita S. Antoni* 9; cf. Evagrius: *Sed quoniam Domino uos eneruante frangimini, multitudine tentatis inferre terrores, cum hoc ipsum infirmitatis indicium sit, quod irrationabilium formas induistis bestiarum*.

[14] *Antonius saga*, 56–58, transl. Ian Shiels (p.c., 20th May 2024). The devil here is *hinn forni höggormr* ('the ancient serpent').

[15] Cf. *Apologeticus* XXII 8–11: *Omnis spiritus ales est. Hoc angeli et daemones…* ('Every spirit is winged; so it is with angels, so it is with demons…'). On the background for hybrid entities, Milne 2007, Ch. 1; on neutral angels, Dando 1980; Newman 2018; on demons, Flint 1991, Rampton 2021; cf. diagrams representing categories of monstrosity in Norse and Old English in Hall 2004, Figs. 1–5.

envisaging hybrid creatures; there may be little or no visually fantastic element at all, even in a nightmare.

Fig. 1. Brendan and his monks meet the *Walscheranden*. German, 1460. Illustration from *Brandans Reise*. MS Cod. Pal. germ. 60, f. 177r, Heidelberg University Library, Heidelberg. Photo: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

Fig. 2. Rebel angels falling to earth, and the Expulsion from Eden. Coloured woodcut illustration, in Ovid, *Cy commence Ovide,... son livre intitulé Métamorphose, contenant XV livres particuliers moralisié par maistre Thomas Waleys* (Bruges, 1484). Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

However, in consciously crafted imagery – like the kind used to describe and depict the *Walscheranden* (Fig. 1), for example – and in dream-cultures generally, hybrid-beings are a recognised type of *adynaton* ('impossibility'), and a standard convention for representing the otherworldly and the oneiric. Someone encountering a demon, elf, or dream-spirit may not initially "see" the figure as visually hybrid, but will find hybridity

among the first codes to be reached for in order to represent the experience, both to themselves and to others (Milne 2024, Ch 3; cf. Vernant 1990, 102). And the external culture of hybrid-forms – painted mermaids, carved demons, narrated dragons – itself feeds back into individual and collective memory, becoming the expected materials of real dreams and delusions.

The nocturnal spirits attacking Anthony manifest as clamour, commotion and phantasmagoria; hybridity, as it were, in speed and action. The element of beating and/or fighting recurs in our sources as an aspect of such encounters: as one-on-one, two-on-one and *en masse* activity.[16] An OE Journey Charm defends against multiple forces, capable, it seems, of both physical and mental attack:

> Against the stab of the pains against the blow of the pains
> Against the terror of the grim ones
> Against the great horror that is hateful to everyone
> And against all loath [things] that fare in upon the land
> I sing a victory chant I bear a victory-stave…
> May the *mare* [night-mare] not mar me…
> Or ever be fearful against my life…[17]

The charm *Wið færstice* (late 10C–early 11C, SW England) similarly envisages "enemies travelling across the land" (Kesling 2020, 113) as a noisy armed cavalcade:

> loud were they, lo, loud, when they rode over the mound
> they were fierce when they rode over the land…
> where those mighty women marshalled their powers
> [and] sent shrieking spears.[18]

As if mirroring such dangers, the Journey Charm evokes its own eerie multitude, then opposes them with multiple protective spirits, listing the Trinity, thirteen biblical figures, the four apostles (as armour), and finally an entire angelic host, *a thousand of thine Angels… a troop of those famed in victory… Seraphim of the spears*.[19] The imagery of nocturnal foes roaming the landscape has later folk parallels. In Orkney, when certain gifted locals sensed evil spirits massing in the countryside at night, they went out to fight them. A man of this kind, nicknamed the Black Doctor, took a stave with him to do battle:

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[16] On fighting/beatings motif as a traditional part of night-traveller/nightmare narratives, Milne 2024, Ch. 2.

[17] Hill 2012, 153–54; Milne 2014, 158; 2024, 296.

[18] "*hlude wæran hy, la hlude, ða hy ofer þone hlæw ridan / wæran anmode ða hy ofer land ridan… þær ðā mihtigan wīf / hyra mægen berǣddon / 7 hȳ gyllende gāras sændan…*" *Lacnunga* CXXVII[b], in Hall 2007, 2.

[19] Dobbie (1942, 6, 126–28, 215–16) emends MS *wega* to *wælgar* ('spears'), which makes sense here; Hill (loc. cit.) offers "seraphim of the paths." On the charm-scenario of invoking multiple protectors, whose qualities imitate those of the threat, see Milne 2024, Ch. 7.

> [He] was the man [for the] fairies or trows—he knew the night they would come out … He'd suddenly spring up, he'd say, "They're out! That's it!" He'd get dressed… maybe a wild night, he'd get dressed, oil coat, sou'wester, and take his — always took his heavy stick and he would set off… in the pitch darkness. He'd come home sometime durin' the night, all over covered of mud, all hacked… an' blood. He'd say, "It was a tough fight," he says, "but I beat them." Now where he'd been or what happened nobody knows, but he'd be out for hours on end, come back like that."[20]

## The Incubus

As often noted, Christian scholars glossed over Classical nature-spirits as demons. Nymphs, nereids, satyrs etc were, of course, already credited with the capacity to arouse desire (cf. nympholepsy, panic), and their new demonic role stresses this aspect also. According to Augustine (354–430), incubi are "woodland spirits [who] mate with human women."[21] Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) says fauns ('hairy ones') are incubi:

> [These are the] Pilosi, who in Greek are named Panitae, in Latin Incubi, or Inui from mating [inire] here and there with animals – from which Incubi are also called, from their pressing down [incumbendus], that is from raping. For often evil ones even appear to women, so that they succeed in lying with them, which demons the Gauls call Dusii, because they perpetrate this impurity continually [assidue]. But that which they call Incubo in everyday language, the Romans say to be Faunus of the Fig…[22]

Notice that, when Isidore attributes to "Pilosi" the defining action of the incubus/dream-demon, by so doing, he confers hybrid characteristics on the incubus. Cassian of Marseilles (360–435) adds that these fauni lead wayfarers astray at night.[23] For the Anglo-Saxons, Puck was originally such a spirit, leading nocturnal travellers into "mires and pitfalls."[24] In pre-modern times, the lone traveller, far from the supporting structures of human civilisation, was liable to attacks of panic (hallucinatory delusion, fear); thus the Journey Charm above defends against terror and horror, as well as more palpable attackers (Borgeaud 1988; cf. Milne 2024, Ch. 5). As late as the 15C, Thomas of

[20] Bruford 1997, 117. The Black Doctor lived in the early 20C; his story collected by Bruford in 1974 from John G. Halcro, South Ronaldsay.

[21] Diatribe against Apuleius, *De Civitate Dei* 15: c.23; Cf. Hutton 2014, 1139, n. 15. Cf. *De Anima* XLV–XLVII on dreaming.

[22] *Etymologiae* VIII, 2:103: *Pilosi, qui Graece Panitae, Latine Incubi appellantur, sive Inui ab ineundo passim cum animalibus. Vnde et Incubi dicuntur ab incumbendo, hoc est stuprando. Saepe enim inprobi existunt etiam mulieribus, et earum peragunt concubitum; quos daemones Galli Dusios vocant, quia assidue hanc peragunt inmunditiam. Quem autem vulgo Incubonem vocant, hunc Romani Faunum ficarium dicunt*; elsewhere (XI.3.21–22), Isidore refers to St Anthony's encounter with a *satyrus* (horned, with goat feet), who identified himself as a mortal desert dweller, or "man of the woods;" Hall 2007b, 303–4.

[23] Hutton 2014, 1139, n. 17. Walter Map, Gerald of Wales and Burchard of Worms are among many reusing these details in their accounts; cf. Petrina 1993; Davenport 2006; Flood 2013.

[24] In 1584, Reginald Scot characterised Robin Goodfellow as a "great bullbeggar [once] much feared;" Hutton 2014, 1146, n. 50. In *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1599), Shakespeare pulls these attributes together; cf. Briggs 1959, 44–47.

Walsingham (d. 1422) tells of a demonic forest incubus seducing a Hampshire woman, and a young man going mad after meeting some beautiful otherworldly women in Cumberland.[25]

Isidore refers to multiple Pilosi, but the incubus works alone. As a solo dream-demon, it occupies the main antagonist role in the structure of the archaic nightmare, a common type of ego-shattering dream, typically envisaged as an attack during sleep by a supernatural predator, whereupon the dreamer awakes in terror. The scenario typically envisaged is an attack during sleep by a supernatural predator. The predator-figure is often (though not invariably) hybrid, and threatens the dreamer with penetration, usually with teeth and claws. In real dream-experience an antagonist of this kind is an alienated (unrecognisable) avatar of the dreamer, given shape from shared cultural imagery; a situation represented in terms of their own cosmology by the composers of fictional dreams.[26] Thus Án the Black dreams the night before an attack (*Laxdæla saga* 48, c.1250–1270):

> A woman came to me, repulsive in appearance, and snatched me to the edge of the bed. She had in one hand a short sword and in the other a trough; she set the sword against my breast, and cut me all open. She took out my entrails, and put brush-wood in their place. After that she went out.[27]

Later, unconscious and wounded:

> I dreamed of the same woman as before, and I thought she took the brushwood out of my stomach and instead put in my entrails, and the change seemed good to me.[28]

The erotic dream has a parallel 'ego-shattering' structure. The incubus mythos, as it evolved, combined the two; so the dream-demon (or a human enemy's alter-ego) mounts a sexual attack during sleep. According to Caelius Aurelianus (5C):

> Those who suffer from the disease of nightmare… imagine that someone has suddenly attacked them and stunned their senses… Some are seized with such grotesque visions that they imagine they see the attacker urging them to satisfy a shameful lust. If they try to take hold of his fingers, they find that he is gone…[29]

Notice the references here to "grotesque visions," lust as well as fear, and the impossibility of grasping the antagonist. By the 13C, Caesarius of Heisterbach (c.1180–

[25] *Historia Anglicana*, sub. 1337 and 1343; summarised in Hutton 2014, 1143.
[26] On the archaic nightmare, Milne 2024, Intro., Ch. 4–5; on aquatic spirits and dreams, Milne 2025; on Norse and Celtic dream-antagonists, Milne, forthcoming.
[27] "Kona kom at mér, óþekkileg, ok kipti mér á stokk fram. Hon hafði í hendi skálm ok trog í annarri; hon setti fyrir brjóst mér skálmina ok reist á mér kviðinn allan ok tók á brott innyflin ok lét koma i staðinn hrís; eftir þat gekk hon út." *Laxdæla saga* 48, transl. Kunz 1997, 76.
[28] "dreymdi mik en sama kona ok fyrr, ok þótti mér hon nú taka hrísit ór maganum, en lét koma innyflin í staðinn, ok varð mér gott við þat skifti." *Laxdæla saga* 49; transl. Kunz, 1997, 80.
[29] *On Chronic Diseases* I, 3:56, 474–75.

c.1240) could assert that the incubus "had no back" – like the *boss-back'd* (hollow) elves of later Scots tradition – this neatly represents its delusory nature.[30] This same topology is ascribed to the Swedish *skogsrä* ('forest ruler'), encountered by lone workers in mountain forests. She appears beautiful from the front, but her "back looked like a rotting log. If a man agreed to make love with her she would guarantee success [and] protect [from] dangers, provided he [remained silent] about her" (ATU F 460.4.1.2; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, 217; Simpson 1988, 221).

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint also, the erotic and the terror-filled dream are the 'same' scenario. X desires/threatens Y, and/or Y desires/threatens X. Whereas Freud distinguished *thanatos* from *eros*, post-Lacanian critical theory sees desire as one drive, polarised depending on its object: the subject either fears or longs for union with the object of desire.[31] Whether the relation between the two is construed as terror, sexual arousal or divine revelation, the close approach of the object of desire is apprehended as an imminent breach of the subject's mind/body, generating overwhelming emotion and consequent ego-shattering. When the object of desire/fear is a supernatural entity, this point of interface is conventionally represented in terms of penetration, commotion and impossibility.

In this context, we might consider a "waking parallel," recorded as an Icelandic memorate (Gunnell 2017, 3–4): a spooky encounter with otherworldly hairy ones, filled with rage, bringing hallucinatory elements of chaos and commotion. An Icelandic community finds on the shore one (or two? the number varies tellingly) drowned, hairy, clawed men. As they try to give them a Christian burial, the text in their Bibles reverses before their eyes, and the priest finds himself saying curses instead of blessings. Afterwards, the creature is sighted banging on the church door with his coffin plank. The whole district becomes a place where people get lost.[32]

The Anglo-Saxons seem to have had their own indigenous (i.e. Germanic) form of dream-demon, usually identified as the *maran*, a term used once or twice to gloss *incubus* (Hall 2007b; Knight 2019). Bald's Leechbook lists remedies against "*ælfsiden* [and] fevers [and if] a *mære* should ride [the patient]…;" also "For a fiend-sick person [controlled] from within with illness" (f. 51v; Hall 2004, 99). Leechbook III (mid-10C) gives "a salve against *ælfcynn* and a *nihtgenga* ('nightwalker') and for those people whom the/a devil has sex with/and against those people whom the/a devil has sex with" (f. 123, section 61; Hall 2004, 123f., 126–27). To be "ridden" by a *maran* at this date evidently differs from the more specific set of *mara* beliefs in 19C–20C Scandinavian folk-culture (Tillhagen 1960; Raudvere 1995; cf. Milne 2024, Ch. 6), though these also have earlier attestations. *Eyrbyggja saga* (13–14C) describes a *mara* attack on the young man Gunnlaugr, by one of two witches competing for him; he is found unconscious, shoulders scratched, flesh

[30] On the one-sided incubus, *Dialogus miraculorum* 3.6 (Scott and Bland 1929, I:132); Caesarius also argued devils could take practically any shape. For incubus and boss-backed elves, Milne 2024, Ch. 4 and 6.

[31] Freud 1958, 1–64; on the term *thanatos*, cf. Jones 1957, 273. The endpoint of desire is its own annihilation, self-shattering union with the object of desire; cf. Milne 2024, Intro., Ch. 3, Ch. 7–8.

[32] From Einar Guðmundsson 1932, I:12–17; transl. in Gunnell 2017, 3–4.

ripped to the bone.[33] It is at least clear, however, that the Anglo-Saxon *maran* shared with *ælfen* the capacity to cause mental disturbance.

**Elves**

Hall (2004) considers these *ælf* constructions:

***ælf*:**
16. The extrasensorial world
16.01 A divine being
16.01.03 A spectre, ghost, demon
16.01.03.04 Elfin race: *Ælfcynno*

Elf: *ælf*(*en*), *pūcag*, *pūcelog*
Of elves: *ælfiscog*
Mountain elf: *beorgælfenq*, *dūnælf*(*en*), *muntælfenog*
Field elf: *feldælfeng*, *landælfog* (i.e. open, unobstructed land 'elf')
Wood elf: *wuduælfeng*, *wudumærg*, *wuduwāsag*
Water elf: *sæælfeng*, *wæterælfeng*
Mental disturbance caused by elf: *ælfādlo*, *ælfsiden*
An incubus: *ælf*, *mera*
A succubus: *lēof* ('beloved')
*maran* (f. pl. *mære*, *merae*): succubae-like beings, strong variant *wudumær*
*ylfig*: affected by elves [?], mad, frantic (Bosworth and Toller 1898, s.v. ilfig); (like) one engaged with an *ælf* or *ælfe*; one speaking prophetically through divine/demonic possession[34]

Wood-, sea- and mountain-elves were understood, as we have seen, in terms of their Classical equivalents, as nature-spirits, with demonic characteristics. As nymph-equivalents, Anglo-Saxon elves were also "non-monstrous" (cf. Hall 2007a, 32), and so more dangerous than evil, though the Harley Glossator (11C) calls them *sinful goddesses*,[35] and Byrhtferth of Ramsey (c.1010–12) gives this invocation against them: *I*

[33] "Gunnlaugur kom eigi heim um kveldið og var um rætt að hans skyldi leita fara en eigi varð af. Um nóttina er Þorbjörn sá út fann hann Gunnlaug son sinn fyrir dyrum. Lá hann þar og var vitlaus. Þá var hann borinn inn og dregin af honum klæði. Hann var allur blóðrisa um herðarnar en hlaupið holdið af beinunum. Lá hann allan veturinn í sárum og var margrætt um hans vanheilsu. Flutti það Oddur Kötluson að Geirríður mun hafa riðið honum, segir að þau hefðu skilið í stuttleikum um kveldið og það hugðu flestir menn að svo væri." *Eyrbyggja saga* 16 (1935, 28-29), transl. Pálsson and Edwards 1989, 47; cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2023, 8. I discuss the best-known Norse *mara* story (*Ynglinga saga*, 13C) in Milne 2024, 282–3, 301–4, 347, and Norse nightmares generally in Milne, forthcoming.

[34] Hall 2004, 19, n. 18, 94–96, 99; 2007a, 9–10; I take the liberty of integrating Hall's in-text corrections/amendments into the orthodox list he cites from Roberts, Kay and Grundy 2000, I, §16.01.03.04.

[35] þa manfullan gydena . ł dunelfa; BL Harley 3376 f. 17r.; Hall 2004, 82.

*command to go from me the sea-people who are called Sirens, and also the Castalidae nymphae (which are, dunælfa) who dwelt on the mountain Helicon*.[36]

Details can be inferred concerning elven habitat (water, mountains, woodland, also open, empty spaces) and habits (seduction, illness, mental disturbance). Elves are thus creatures of both the natural and the extra-sensorial world: this is how their double-nature manifests. Among *ælf*-related medical conditions, we find in the Leechbooks skin and eye problems, and various kinds of body-penetration, to do with sex, sharp inward pains or wounds – i.e. the same form of attack threatened by the nightmare-antagonist[37] – with a stress on mental disorders and fever. Of particular interest are the implications of *ylgig* ('elf-taken') and *ælfsiden* ('worked on by elves'), whose contexts make it clear they refer to madness, delirium and delusion; also to prophetic vision (Hall 2004, 93–94, 96–97, 99, 102; cf. Hall 2007a, 120). The herb *ælfþone*[38] was prescribed *against a frenzied heart/mind* (Leechbook III, ff. 126v–127r; Hall 2004, 99), also, as we saw above, *for a fiend-sick person*.

Fever in general presents as perceptual commotion. To be sick is to be 'at death's door,' literally and figuratively; halfway into the spirit-realm (cf. Milne 2024, Ch. 7–8). As John Carey has argued (2024) – analysing an Irish vision of the otherworld (*Echtrae Chormaic*, 12C MS), notable for its impossible imagery – ultimately, the otherworld is this one, seen differently; seen, that is, in an altered state of mind. Doubleness – of mind, vision and perspective – characterises the old elves and their cultural deployment, including their associations with seduction. Hence their role as creatures of dream-culture, which informs the imagery of both dreams and waking hallucination and delusion.

There is, then, a strong perceived connection between desire in all its forms (need, threat, terror, lack, longing) and the invocation of otherworldly denizens, metaphorically or magically. These psychological aspects of elves have parallels further north. Snorri (*Skaldskaparmál*; MacLeod and Mees 2006, 64) cites *troll-woman's wind* as a kenning for *passion*; its primary sense seems to be mental turbulence, as if stirred up by an uncanny being.[39] The primary connotation of *nall*, the 'n-rune' or 'need-rune' in many Nordic charms — most laconically as *naud nau(d)* (Bergen rune stick NB585M) — is to connect desire with *monstrous otherworldly creatures of great unfathomable power* (Mitchell 2008, 221–25; cf. McKinnell and Simek 2004, 140–44; Hall 2004, 146). A 14C spell of sexual compulsion names elves, trolls, ogres, then a valkyrie; the latter possibly standing for

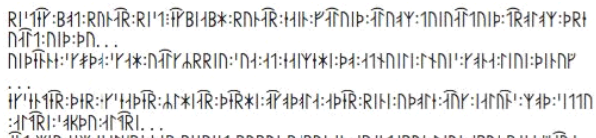
[36] Ic hate gewitan fram me þa m<e>remen, þe synt si<ren>e geciged, & eac þa Castalidas nymphas (þæt synt dunylfa), þa þe wunedon on Elicona þære dune; *Enchiridion* 134; Hall 2004, 82.

[37] The penetration aspect recalls the sexual aspect of the incubus, and the predator-form ascribed to fallen angels, as in the *Walscheranden* and Anthony's demons.

[38] Probably helleborus, which, according to Isidore: *Romani alio nomine veratrum dicunt pro eo quod sumptum motam mentem insanitatem reducit* ('the Romans call by the alternative name veratum, because when consumed it leads back the mind withdrawn into insanity…'); *Etymologiae* II:17.9.24; in Hall 2004, 97–99.

[39] Cf. Quinn 2012, 255: "kennings of the type 'wind of the giantess'…express the idea that human thought processes… might be explained as the effects of powerful supernatural forces."

the woman against whom the magic is directed.[40] The text hooks together these entities with 'unbearable desire,' anger, 'wolfish perversion' and sleeplessness, to bring the woman to the speaker:



…I cut cure-runes
once against the elves,
twice against the trolls,
thrice against the ogres…
Against the harmful
so that she never shall,
evil woman! –
I send you,
wolfish perversion

I cut help runes;

*skag*-valkyrie,
though she ever would –
injure (?) your life.
I look at you,
and unbearable desire

May distress descend on you
Never shall you sit,

and *jotuns* wrath
never shall you sleep…

(that you) love me as yourself.
Beirist (?) rubus rabus et arantabus laus abus rosa gaua…[41]

Another rune-stick spell describes its object of desire as, *the old wind of the Crag-Norns… the beautiful dangerous fir-tree of the feast-bales of the fish-depths* (Liestøl 1964, 27–29; Macleod and Mees 2006, 63–65; Simek 2018, 25–52). Here, riddling kennings (fir-tree/woman, feast-bales/[sea] gold ⇒ a woman in jewellery) reference natural forces and spirits, to define both the woman-object and the speaker's desire for her. The imagery works through condensation and displacement, in a manner analogous to the processes of dream-distortion. The (unclear, fragmentary) second verse must be some kind of incantation [*galdr*], *tightly held* (?), perhaps indicating reins in the hands of an ogress. Magical constructions, such as kennings, curses, riddles and charms, which represent desire and otherworldly phenomena as bound together, grow out of wider cosmological traditions, the matter of dream-culture; the *immanent context* of power-laden words (Foley 1992, 276–81).

[40] Valkyries can take on an attribute of nature-spirits when they change into *álptarhamir* [swan-skins] and fly; cf. *Vǫlundarkviða* 2014, I, 428.

[41] *Rist ek bótrúnar / rist ek bjargrúnar / einfalt við álfum / tvífalt við trollum / þrífalt við þu[rsum]…/Við inni skœðu / skag-valkyrju / svát ei megi / þótt œ vili / lœvís kona! —lífi þínu g[randa] / Ek sendi þér / ek sé á þér / ylgjar ergi / ok úþola. / Á þér hríni úþoli / ok / joluns (?) móð / Sittu aldri / sof þú aldri…/ant mér sem sjalfri þér / Beirist (?) rubus rabus et arantabus laus abus rosa gaua…* (Bergen rune stick B 257); McKinnell and Simek 2004, 131–33; MacLeod and Mees 2006, 34–35.

Figure 3. Nocturnal Dance of Elves - that is, Spectres. Woodcut illustration, in Olaus Magnus, Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus III (Rome, 1555), 112. Photo © Lars Henriksson.

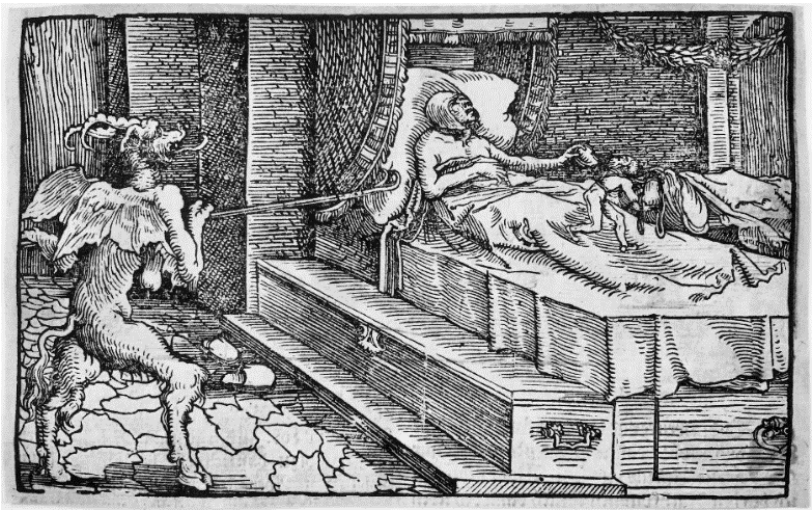


Figure 4. Hans Weiditz, Incubus approaches sleeper. Wood engraving, in Francesco Petrarca, *Trostspiegel für Glück und Unglück des Francesco Petrarca* (Augsburg, 1532), CVII. Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg. Photo: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.

Consider how the *Legendary* passage quoted above links its personnel, and the set of shifts this involves. The common thread is desire (fear/longing) between human protagonist/victims and supernatural actors. From the Archangel Michael (lines 223–60), the author's mind moves to fallen angels as (solo) bringers of nightmares (lines 227–35); then to desire-filled encounters *by day and night* (lines 239–47), with (solo) female spirits (*in wood and meadow*); and finally to multiple *eleuene*, active in the remote countryside. Unlike the fallen angel/incubus, these *eleuene* spend their time dancing and feasting. But, like incubi – and Pilosi – they draw men in by arousing desire, and sex with them has

disastrous consequences. Tasked with illustrating a "nocturnal dance of elves or spectres" (Fig. 3, Olaus Magnus 1555, 112), or an incubus (Fig. 4), sixteenth-century artists recuperate them all as conventional hybrid faun-demons.

As Hall (2007a, 78–81) makes clear, the feminine *ælf* was early accepted as a gloss for nymph, dryad, even muse, and in this role credited with great beauty. From this tradition derives the figure of the seductive otherworldly woman in Celtic and Norse legend and ultimately in Romance and folktale.[42] Pwyll, prince of Dyfed (*Mabinogion*), meets such a lady in a vision at a mound/barrow, following her to the otherworld. Connla the Fair is similarly lured, never to return.[43] The tale of Cuchulain unconscious on his sickbed (9C), beaten in his dreams by otherworldly women, has all the nightmare ingredients in a different arrangement (Milne 2024, Ch. 7). Norse parallels include Helgi Þórison, who takes an otherworldly wife, surviving for a year only on his return (*Helga þáttr Þórissonar*).

There is always a price for these desire-filled encounters: death, sickness, madness, absence, loss of human time. Such tales are akin, as Gunnell (2017, 12–15) notes, to stories involving selkies or figures such as Mélusine (Milne 2024, Ch 3). Some folk traditions envisage not an elven court (not yet) but a parallel world,[44] in the sea or beyond it, from whence comes the magical woman and to which she leads her human partner. The doubleness written into the mythos, is what enables the clash of worlds to turn nightmarish in cases where a mortal man sleeps with an elf-woman.

Recall that, in nightmare, as in the erotic dream, the demonic interface involves penetration of the body. In the great Scots ballad, *Thomas Rhymer* (Child 37), Thomas encounters the fairy queen in the wilderness, under a tree, and makes love to her. But in the earliest version (*Thomas of Erceldoune*, 15C), after he lies with her, she becomes hideous:[45]

> Hir hare it hange all ouer hir hede,
> His eghne semede owte, thatare were graye.
> And alle the riche clothynge was a-waye,
> That he by-fore sawe in that stede;
> Hir a schanke blake, hir other graye,
> And all hir body lyke the lede.
> (Thornton MS, lines 131–36)
>
> On euery syde he lokyde abowete,
> he sau he myght no whare fle;

[42] E.g. ML B 81.2.2 (Mermaids tear their mortal lovers to pieces), ML 5090 (Married to fairy woman), ML 5095 (Fairy woman pursues a man); ATU F 300 (Marriage or liaison with fairy), B 81.2 (Mermaid marries man), etc. Cf. Lofstedt 1993, 245–58; and Milne 2025.

[43] Chadwick 1968, 33–50, discusses also Aislinge Óengus (Irish), Breudwyt Rhonabwy and Breudwyt Macsen Wledig (Welsh).

[44] See Hutton 2014, 1138, n. 9, 1139, and refs. cited there; Gunnell 2017, 11–13.

[45] On the relation between the two, see Lyle 2007, 29–36, who thinks the 'loathly lady' episode in the Erceldoune romance (lines 109–56) is a later interpolation, but argues that the romance itself probably derives from an earlier tale.

Sche woxe so grym and so stowte,
The Dewyll he wende she had be.
(Lansdowne MS 762, lines 141–44)[46]

Precisely at the point of touch, the object of desire turns repugnant.[47] As the polarity of desire switches, the protagonist finds himself under compulsion to the queen, who takes him to her land. In a strange and striking image, Thomas and the queen walk or ride through a river or sea of blood, on their way to Faerie[48]

37A.7 For forty days and forty nights
He wade thro red blude to the knee,
And he saw neither sun nor moon,
But heard the roaring of the sea.

37C.16 It was mirk mirk night, and there was nae stern light,
And they waded thro red blude to the knee;
For a' the blude that's shed on earth
Rins thro the springs o that countrie.

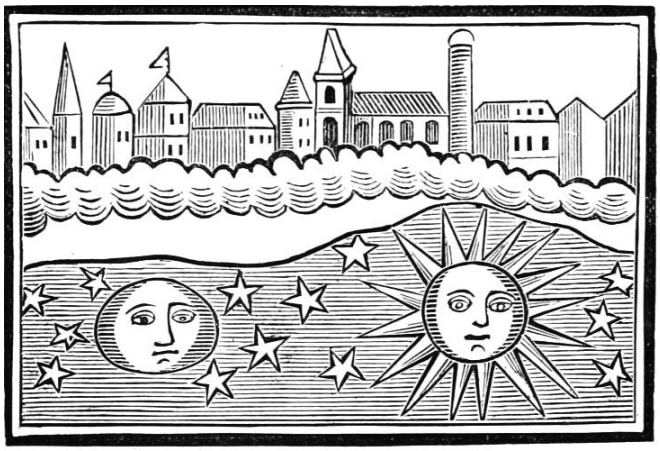


Figure 5. Anon., The Sun, Moon, Stars, and Earth Reversed. Woodcut, from 18C English chapbook. Reproduced in John Ashton, *Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century with Facsimiles, Notes, and Introduction* (London, 1882), 272. Photo: Public Domain Review.

This oneiric journey is a masterly expression of the other great power of the elves: their role in illness, healing, madness and nightmare. The roaring of the sea is like the beating of a heart, or pulse; as if they travel to the otherworld, impossibly, through the caverns of the body. Child 37C gives the key imagery of wading through sunless, moonless,

[46] "Thomas of Erceldoune," in Caldwell 2007, 235–56.
[47] Lyle, loc. cit.; on the MSS, Albrecht 1954; Caldwell 2007, 235–56; Sebo 2013, 11–26.
[48] On crossing rivers en route to the Otherworld, see e.g. Simpson 1966, 1–20; Power 1985, 157–58.

starless rivers. These are world-upside-down motifs, or *adynata* (cf. Fig. 5).[49] The queen gives an explanation for this uncanny place: *for a' the blude that's shed on earth rins thro the springs o that countrie*. The imagery employs reversal, inversion, condensation, displacement and change-of-scale; standard markers for dreams and otherworldly experience.[50]

In *Thomas of Erceldoune*, the lady takes Thomas to a fair castle on a hill, reminiscent of the courtly castles of the neutral angels in the Latin *Brendan* or Middle Irish *Echtrae Chormaic* (Carey 2024). On arrival, there is feasting, sport, music and revelry (commotion, joy, play); the characteristic activity of elves *en masse*. Elves in multiple manifest also as the fairy-ride, echoing the "enemies travelling across the land" in *Wið færstice*. In the ballad of *Tam Lin* (Child 39), Janet must pick out her lover Tam from a cavalcade of fairy riders: a seasonal procession, held at midnight on Halloween, on its way to pay a sacrifice to Hell. The fairies, in an echo of their fallen angels status, owe feudal dues to Lucifer (cf. Lyle 2007, 136–37). And *ride* in Scots is equally a *rade*: a "predatory expedition, or foray, by mounted men" (Henderson and Cowan 2001, 62), ending in battle or the taking of prisoners. In 1576, Bessie Dunlop witnessed and described the fearsome clamour of such a fairy host: as if *heavin and earth had gane togidder… they raid into the loich with mony hiddous rumbill* (ibid., 41–42).

*Tam Lin* compresses a nightmare-scenario into its finale. Under glamour, Janet's object of desire (Tam) shapeshifts in her arms, finally taking his right form. The elf-queen then curses Janet, and addresses Tam:

> "had I kend [known]…
> what now this night I see
> I wad hae taen out thy twa grey een [eyes]
> And put in twa een o tree"
> "... I [wad] taen out that heart of flesh
> [And] put in a heart of stane."
> (Child I, 39A, 39B)

The imagery of body-part replacement reveals that the queen is in possession of fearsome powers akin to those of the woman who disembowels Án the Black in his dream. An 18C tale recorded in Aberdeen brings us back full circle, as it were, to the elven multitude as marked by commotion and hallucination. A boy rescues his sister, in the manner of *Tam Lin*, from a band of fairies who share the attributes of St Anthony's demons:

[49] *Adynata* are commonly used to characterise the otherworld; cf. the Middle Irish tale, *Echtra Cormaic meic Airt*, wherein King Cormac, lost in a mist, emerges in "an unfamiliar plain, where… a group of men were endeavouring, in a high wind, to thatch a house with feathers…" Carey 2024, forthcoming.

[50] A similar idea is found, for instance, in the widespread Flum Jordan charm, which works by matching the flow of the sacred river to the flow of the patient's blood; earliest extant MSS in Latin (c.900), Middle English (14C); Roper 2005, 33. On shift-of-scale as a dream-motif, Milne 2007, Ch. 1–2; 2024, Ch. 2 .

> …of a sudden the moat [fairy hill] seemed to be on fire around him, he… heard the most dreadful thunder… imagined, frightful birds and beasts seemed to make towards him out of the fire which he knew was not real… He kept hold of his sister for the space of an hour and three quarters, when the Cocks began to crow, the fire disappeared and all the frightful imps vanished, he held her in his arms and fell on his knees and gave God thanks… [she] embraced him saying, she was now safe since he had put his clothing on her, he then brought her home… (Lyle 2007, 138)

What we might term migratory markers of structure – hybridity/doubleness, affect-laden action (sex, penetration, violence), the issue of number – supply the mechanisms wherein the figures of incubi, elves and fallen angels could be cast as fulcra for various desire-filled oneiric and otherworldly encounters. Fever or illness, travelling through foreign wilderness, or just falling asleep, opened the portals for such experiences. The intrinsic hybridity and double-nature of dream-demons and elves enabled them to be pressed into service in this way. Their dual or shifting shape presented a means of configuring desire as alienated; fear, terror or lust projected as if emanating from an external agency.

The solo/multiple distinction offers different topological structures with which to envisage such agencies. Fallen angels (typically multiple) could be apprehended both as (monstrous) demons or as duplicitous nature-spirits, or both. The early medieval incubus starts (perhaps) as a pack of fauns in the wilderness – like Puck or the Anglo-Saxon *eluene* – leading lone travellers astray. By the time of the *Legendary*, a lone bad angel, descending from the lower air, could manifest to an individual as a terrifying or arousing dream. Solo dream-predators, in whatever guise, present a focussed threat: a single charged surface confronting the dreamer/victim; like certain nature-spirits (cf. the *skogsrä*). *En masse*, demons and elves induce mental disorder rather by making the world around the victim appear mad (as if *heavin and earth had gane togidder*). As a shapeshifting howling mob, in the clamour of feast, dance or ride – dangerous or seductive – multiple-entity imagery envisages the human surrounded on all sides and overwhelmed. Hybridity (of visual form or double-nature), number and consequential typical action, can thus be seen as dream-cultural operators, enabling dream-demons and elves to be construed and used as complex templates of desire, over centuries in a range of ways, taking on as needed the roles and attributes of nature-spirits and nightmares.

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# THE *VETĀLAPAÑCAVIṂŚATI* FRAME TALE AND ITS FOLKLORE FOUNDATION

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The importance of ancient Indian prose for the field of folkloristics is well known in the history of the discipline; Benfey's nineteenth-century migration theory followed by Köhler and Cosquin is certainly exemplary. Although criticised for a long time now, the migration approach can offer something even today, as it has been proven (rather unexpectedly) by Dundes—in his study about the walled-up wife, the pioneer of American structuralism traced the origin of the Balkan ballad sujet to the north Indian ballad (Dundes 1996, 185–204). Mythologists and neo-mythologists turned towards other genres, such as Vedic hymns (Max Müller) or epic poetry (Dumézil). The typological-comparative approach of Russian literary history and folkloristics has affected Indology, too. In his seminal study *Ancient Indian Prose* (1961), P. A. Grintser showed the folklore foundation of numerous tales, and he compared Indian material with European at the same time, but not in the older (migrational) sense of 'influences' and 'borrowings.' In this paper, the frame tale of the tale collection *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* will be examined from the folkloristic angle relying on the assumption of transcultural character of genres and their long oral history and on the theories of possible ethnological sources of some narrative themes, initiation at first place. It is the belief of the author of the paper that such an analysis could be of use to Indologists, since it can reveal the existence of deeper, comparatively significant patterns under the typical Indian themes, which makes it possible for the corpus to be understood in a new (comparative) way. Such an approach can be useful to folklorists too, since it confirms the widespread existence and continuity of some sujets and genres (which, regardless of how much it might seem to be obvious, is quite significant considering the recent disputing of the oral continuity about the so-called new genealogical method in the fairy

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tale research). The *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* has a few versions: Somadeva's (part of *The Ocean of Story—Kathāsaritsāgara*), Kṣemendra's, Śivadāsa's, Jambhaladatta's, and Valabhadasa's; none of them is a prototype (the one closest to the prototype is either Jambhaladatta's [Winternitz 1968, 331], or Śivadāsa's version [Sathaye 2014, 170]). It shares characteristics with other Indian prose tale collections: there is no prototype, but a number of versions; it is uncertain when it was created (the versions range from the eleventh to the fifteenth century); the frame tale technique is applied (here less compositionally loosely than in the *Pañcatantra* or the *Śukasaptati*—the action and narration time coincides). The collection did not travel to the East and West in the same way as was the case with the famous *Pañcatantra*, probably because of the fact that it is very closely connected to specific Indian realia. However, it got reception in the cultural circle under the Indian influence: there is a Mongolian version (*Siddhi kür—The Bewitched Corpse*), a Tibetan version, translations to Newari and Thai, as well as Buryat and Kalmyck versions, from where it entered the folklore of these peoples (Šarakšinova 1963; Robin 2006); individual tales entered the *Tutinameh*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and *The Forty Viziers*. Within the confines of India, it has been translated into modern Indian languages; variants of the tales can also be found in new Indian folklore. Beside the cognateness of the tales with some of the tales by Boccaccio and Basile, it also reverberated directly in world literature too: Thomas Mann, who became acquainted with the tale collection through the Indologist Heinrich Zimmer (who wrote the book of essays entitled *The King and the Corpse* inspired by the frame tale), wrote his interpretation of the tale about the substituted heads (1940). Mann's novella was interpreted into an opera twice (Peggy Glanville-Hicks, *The Transposed Heads*, 1954; Isidora Žebeljan, *Two Heads and a Girl*, 2012).[1]

Indologists interested in folkloristics have paid attention to this tale collection, such as the aforementioned Grintser or Walter Ruben who devoted the whole monograph (published in the FFC) to the ethnographic background of this collection, analysing each tale individually (Śivadāsa's version). Although it was noticed a long time ago that the classification of folklore prose (essentially based on European material) cannot be easily applied to Indian material (Hertel 1921, 4; Grintser 1961, 39ff.), Jolles (1968, 187–90) qualified the tales from this collection as *casus*, and most of them have been classified according to the ATU system (*Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, Śivadāsa's version); the presence of the variants of some famous types has attracted the attention of folklorists (e.g., for the princess on the pea, see Shojaei Kawan 2005).[2] *EM* (Sathaye 2014) does not designate the type of the frame tale, but singles out the motifs F 813.0.1 ('Fruits containing jewels') and K 715 ('Deception into allowing oneself to be hanged'). The author of the text is of the opinion that there are more motifs to be found, and what's more, that some tale types and basic characteristics of the fairy tale genre can be recognised.

[1] The same Indian sujet was interpreted by Goethe and Marguerite Yourcenar, but they used other sources.

[2] The same is true of the variants in other languages too, e.g., a variant of Cinderella in the Tibetan interpretation (Schlepp 2002).

In the frame tale (the details vary in the versions, it is not the case that each one of them contains them all), King Vikrama (the legendary, popular king of Indian literature who appears in other collections too, such as the *Siṃhāsanadvatriṃśikā*) is gifted the fruit which turns out to contain hidden jewels by an ascetic. When the king asks how to repay him, the ascetic requires him to come to the cemetery (the burning ground, to be more precise) at night to help him with a magic rite. The ascetic orders him to bring the corpse hanging from a tree in the cemetery. The king goes there and shoulders the corpse, but a *vetāla* has entered the corpse—a demonic being possessing dead bodies (it is sometimes translated as a vampire, although it is not quite the same, or a goblin). It riddles the king and the king has to provide the answers (if he knows the answer and does not say it, his head or heart would burst—in Śivadāsa's and Somadeva's versions): those are actually tales ending with a problem the king needs to solve. Although the ascetic has warned him to be silent, the king must answer this and he does it successfully. To stop by the example mentioned supra: the heroine's husband and brother are decapitated—the goddess revives them after her prayer, but their heads are switched and placed on the wrong bodies. Who is the husband and who is the brother? However, when the king solves the problem, the *vetāla* jumps back onto the tree, the king takes it down, and that repeats until 24 tales are told (the frame story is considered to be the 25th). The king does not know the answer to the last question-tale, but the *vetāla* is satisfied with him and reveals that the ascetic actually wants to sacrifice the king (the reader also finds out the prehistory of the dead man: in Jambhaladatta's variant he broke a vow and a guru put a curse on him; the curse that was on him has been lifted). Acting upon the *vetāla*'s advice, the king outwits and kills the ascetic, gods appear to him and, endowed with the promise of a kingdom, he returns to the capital.

Truly, the frame tale brings the 'full-blooded' Indian atmosphere. The rite that the ascetic wishes to perform with the acquiring of *vetāla*'s power (*vetālasādhana*) exists in the magic practice of India and Tibet (Walter 2004; Smith 2006, 325–26; cf. also Jacobsen 2012, 138, 287; as for the Shaiva Tantra context of 'punitive rebirth,' see 291–93). The *vetāla* is a lower-level mythology being (for more information about the *vetāla*, see Dezső 2010), which is not mentioned in the mythology of the two great Indian epics. Some other elements in the whole tale collection (such as decapitation as a form of self-sacrifice) are positioned in the tantric context. Louis Renou even deems the whole collection to be yogic and tantric (Renou 1963, 12), and Winternitz (1968, 332–33) recognises the "tantric ground," but wonders if it can be connected with one religion only, listing the elements of various religions (cf. also Sathaye 2014, 180). The gods appearing in the end might be the Goddess, Trimūrti, Śiva. The religious affiliation of the ascetic-antagonist varies (Kapālika, Buddhist, Jain). The couple which the king and the ascetic represent and their relationship, antagonistic or helpful, is typical of ancient Indian literature.[3] An ascetic tricking a king into some secluded place under the pretext so that he might kill him is mentioned in *Arthaśāstra* 13.2 (172) (Ruben 1944, 10), a treatise on political science (of its political realism says a lot that it was highly estimated by

[3] See the collection of papers on the kings and ascetics in classical Indian literature (Rossi and Pieruccini 2009), in which this tale collection is not mentioned.

Kissinger). The correct answers to the *vetāla*'s questions are related to the knowledge about the Indian cultural context. On the other hand, answers to some questions vary in different variants which indicates that the relation between the riddle and the answer is rather conditional. However, certain narrative patterns well-known in the research of folklore genres can be recognised under the Indian layer consequently making this Indian collection more understandable in the comparative context.

The core, so to say, of the frame tale rests on a specific chronotope: an encounter with a demonic being at the time and place marked as dangerous when combined. In folklore, this chronotope is most clearly manifested in demonological legend (a crossroads, a water mill, cemetery + nighttime, the period between midnight and the first sounding of roosters, for example). In belief legend a demonic being often sits on a man's shoulders, that is, rides him (plague rides a man among the Serbs; in Czech belief narratives – type 4. B.95, according to Luffer 2014). Here the man himself puts the body on the shoulder (not knowing about the *vetāla*), which can be regarded as a variation of the traditional demonological motif—it is not only that the king does not know that the corpse is possessed but the motif serves to portray the king's heroic behaviour. Yet another feature of demonic space and the encounter with a demonic being is silence. Responding to a demonic being has a fatal ending, so one should not do it (in Slavic folklore: SM 2001, 248–49; for Lithuanian folklore Kerbelyte, motif 1.1.1.10. 'The Hero Evades the Antipode's Negative/Magical Influence'). The relatedness between the chthonic world and silence can be encountered in the wider complexes of folk demonology too, and it is related to death in general in Slavic folklore (SM 2001, 123–24; Nevskaiâ 1999); in Roman religion, manes were referred to as *taciti*, the underground *orcus quietatis*, and the mother of the Lares *Dea Tacita*, *Dea Muta* (Ranke 1978, 161); in Irish mythology the 'dead are silent' (motif C405, according to Cross 1952), and 'silence is prescribed in fairyland' (C405*). Here the ascetic who sends the king orders him to remain silent too. It is emphasised that the *vetāla* wants to disturb the king's silence. When the king does start speaking, replying to a question, the demon runs back onto the tree again. However, this core has become much more developed than in a demonological legend, and the relation between the man and the demon is different: while in a belief legend, the man who crossed the border suffers consequences and the demon triumphs, in this tale the hero triumphs, and the relation to the demon is much more complex. This positioning of a man in the centre of all action fits the poetics of a tale (unlike a belief legend), and some of the structural similarities bring the text closer precisely to the fairy tale genre. The ascetic who sends the king to accomplish a dangerous task and wishes to behead him would fit the function of a dispatcher and a villain. His sending of the king to fetch the corpse from the cemetery resembles the type AaTh 461, as well as AaTh 930, in particular the part with "Uriah's letter." The sending on a quest to hell, i.e., to the fairy-tale 'otherworld' is the equivalent of sending to the cemetery (or to the end of the cemetery)—both of them carry chthonic symbolism. In type AaTh 461, the hero gets the task to solve the riddles too (why a tree does not flourish, etc.). Although in the said types one goes to the otherworld, which is far away, by crossing the border which is marked in fairy tales (a mountain, a river, a forest), there

is no essential difference: in both cases, a hero walks into a different world in which he must pass tests in order to return from it successfully. The fairy-tale otherworld is in this case and generally—not only in the said types of sending to the hell—interpreted as the transformation of an originally chthonic world. Then the *vetāla* appears to be a typical fairy-tale being of the otherworld testing the hero. (Just like in type 461, the devil possesses knowledge; in the 'contamination' 735+460B+737B* which is so frequent in the Balkan area that it could be considered a separate type, in the part which matches 460B, the deity of destiny responds to the questions). In this case, it is not the kindness test, but the wisdom one (i.e., the knowledge of certain culturological norms contained in the questions), as well as the courage test. That explains why the king breaks the prohibition of the demonic chronotope and answers the questions asked by the demonic being. At the level of Indian realia, he is the protector of dharma as king and he must fulfil the promise given to the ascetic, as well as—quite exemplary—to answer the questions which resemble a court trial (Ruben 1944, 8, 12–14).[4] At a deeper level, as the hero of the tale, he must pass the test (but another layer is activated after that and the demon slips away because of the disturbed silence). The *vetāla* comes across as one of the ambiguous otherworldly fairy-tale creatures: seemingly a villain, the *vetāla* is actually a test master, and in the end, it turns out to be a helper by saving the king's life—but only once the king has passed all the tests. This is an example of how a tale can be read at the level of articulation (Indian) and at the deeper level of the genre poetics. The same could be applied to the relations among the characters. The triangle of the king–the ascetic–the *vetāla* can be understood in the spirit of the *Pañcatantra*: a friend is unmasked as an enemy and an enemy as a friend. Regarded through the prism of Propp's dramatis personae functions (the villain, the helper, the dispatcher), they can be observed in a wider genre context. Thus, the king's relationship with the *vetāla* is more complex: namely, having listened to the *vetāla*'s tales and having provided the answers, the king helped the dead man lift his own curse, i.e., to get rid of the evil spirit. This is not stated so explicitly as in other tale collections, and it is also not so clear in all versions, but it is clear enough (Sathaye treats it in the same way, ibid.), and it becomes even clearer if the collection is compared with other Indian collections in which frame stories relate narration with curse lifting: in *Siṃhāsanadvātriṃśikā* the statues are Parvati's companions from whom curses are lifted once they have narrated their tales; in *Śukasaptati* the curse is lifted off a heavenly being in the form of a parrot and it loses its animal shape once it has finished narrating; the curse of heavenly beings and the narration appears also in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. Narration as a means of curse lifting has later turned into narration as a means of fighting death, seemingly realistically depicted, in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *Bakhtiyarnama*, the *Sindbad-nameh*; even in the *Decameron* there is a contrast between the plague epidemic and story-telling. This motif in the *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* fits the character of Vikrama as the hero of a fairy tale lifting someone else's curse.

[4] The *vetāla* warns the king about what would happen to him if he knows the answer but fails to respond, but when the king does not know the answer to the last question and remains silent, there are no consequences.

What is contained in the king's otherworldly encounter with the *vetāla* is the theme of initiation. It has already been noticed that the tale could be regarded as a variation of the theme about the relationship between the sacral and spiritual powers; in other works of ancient Indian literature the roles could be inverted (an ascetic with a *vetāla* helps the king)—and the tantric initiation can also appear in which an ascetic initiates the king (White 1996, 304ff.). Here, the ascetic is a villain, but more importantly, the present type of initiation is far more archaic than the Indian setting and it is woven into the genre itself. It should be mentioned—going back to the ancient Indian literature context—that the initiation sujet featuring riddles is prominent in some other texts too. In the episode "Yakṣa's questions" (*Yakṣapraśna*) from the *Mahābhārata*, Pandava's brothers come to a lake to drink water; a *yakṣa* (a being of lower mythology) as the lake master asks it of them to solve riddles first; when the four brothers drink the water having ignored the request, they die. The fifth brother Yudhiṣṭhira—a dharma embodiment—answers all the questions related to dharma, moral, and behaviour, but also cosmology (Who makes the sun rise? Brahma; What is reborn after its birth? The moon) successfully, the *yakṣa* revives his brothers. The lake is also a marked place, a gathering place of demonic forces, but also a passageway to the otherworld.[5] In *Kauṣītaki upaniṣad* (I, 2) the Moon, as the doorway to the heavenly world, questions the souls of the dead; who answers goes on into that world, and who does not, goes back to earth. The connection with rite can be recognised in the text of the *Rig Veda* (I, 164, the famous cosmological riddle, year-riddle), as well as the *Yajur Veda* (XXIII, 46–64) in which in a rite the priests riddle each other (for more examples, see Grintser 1961, 103). Riddles are part of the complex related to ritual on the one hand and mythical knowledge on the other hand, as Jolles wrote about it a long time ago, actually related to life and death (Jolles 1968, 129–36), just like in the *Vetāla's Tales*. The most famous examples of the connection between a riddle and death in comparative mythology are, of course, the examples of Oedipus and Sphinx or the *Vafþrúðnismál* (Poetic Edda); the correct answer meant the passing of a soul through the gates in Egyptian eschatology. In this case, the riddle is related to initiation (but the questions have shifted from cosmological knowledge to realia). So, the examples from the collection have their parallels in the Indian rite and myth, and more widely, but the initiation is simultaneously embedded in the foundation of the narrative. The fairy tale is the genre with initiation accompanied by the visit to the otherworld at the foundation, according to Vladimir Propp's thesis (*The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale*), which has remained the basis for fairy tale interpretation with some modifications (see Vaz da Silva 2023) until today.

Taking the *vetāla* from the tree can also be understood as the initiation motif (the king climbs the tree because the *vetāla* runs away from him jumping from branch to branch towards the top). Here we rely on the interpretation of an episode with tree climbing from the *Mahābhārata* given by S. Neveleva showing very convincingly the folklore initiation foundation of tree climbing (Neveleva 1988, 131–32). The tree is mentioned there also as the border marker (ibid, 154) with the parallels in the New Year rite. In

[5] The lake as a passageway to the otherworld also appears in *Vetāla's Tales* (in the tale no. 7 of Jambhaladatta's version).

another episode from the *Mahābhārata* there is the theme of a dead man on a tree too (ibid, 140–141). Moreover, the place to which the king traverses is in the south, and the south is dedicated to Yama, the god of the dead (Smith 2006, 325–26).[6]

In the end, the king returns to the city, gains magic power (Jambhaladatta), becomes a *cakravartin* (a world emperor) and he is promised to become the king of the *vidyādhara* (supernatural beings), which is his confirmation as a king, in particular with regard to the legendary character of Vikrama, but it also looks like a variant of the fairy-tale ending with acquiring of a kingdom. The only aspect that is missing is the acquisition of a princess.

The king does not seek magic power,[7] which can be regarded as a variant of a magic object, but helps the ascetic upon his request. However, in the end, he actually gains it. In the same vein, the hero/heroine of a fairy tale chooses the smallest or the most modest object (the smallest box, a mangy horse), which is also a test, only to gain the proper means after that.

The already identified motif K715 corresponds to the broader fairy tale poetics, the one that Röhrich recognised as the fairy-tale "mirror punishment," *lex talionis* (Röhrich 1964, 147), i.e., the fairy-tale code of justice and balance. Therefore, this is not a mere danger evasion, but a fairy-tale regularity, the relation of justice and injustice, violation and punishment defined by behaviour towards the hero.

We can summarise. We have singled out the tale motifs (as the smallest units); the possible tale types; the genre similarities with the fairy tale (punishment and regularity); and also, the initiation sujet; that sujet, alongside some of the motifs, brings the frame tale closer to a fairy tale, but it also exists in the rite. The listed themes and motifs can seem quite obvious to a folklorist; and yet, the tale has not been analysed in detail in this way, and such a systematisation could help in the understanding of its background and source. On a bigger scale than motifs, we can recognise fairy tale patterns, confirming the long history of specific types, but also of the genre itself. What seems to be the tale's core is initation (with a visit to the world of the dead), proving again the theory of initiation as the source of the fairy tale. The author of the written collection used folklore forms, smaller and bigger, as well as the belief chronotope (combining them around that core in a manner perhaps similar to the one used by the author of the ancient Egyptian *Tale of the Two Brothers*)[8]. In that sense, the tale is significant comparatively as an example of the existence of folkloric 'building blocks' which constitute the narrative, as well as of the adjustment to the specific cultural setting. Speaking of the latter, initiation is part of the core of the genre itself, but it is also, as it has been confirmed by the examples from Indian mythology and rite, part of the environment from which the tale stemmed, unlike European fairy-tales where it becomes an archaic layer in the depth of the narrative. As

[6] In Somadeva's variant the ascetic directs the king to go to the south; in Jambhadatta's version the tree is located to the north of the cemetery, but the cemetery itself is in the south (*dakṣiṇaśmaśāna*).

[7] In one of the versions, he actually says the following: "let magic power be mine or not perform what you have to do. What must I do for you" ("mama siddhir bhavatu na vā tvam ātmanaḥ kāryam sādhaya. Mayā kiṃ te kartavyaṃ tad vada," Jambhaladatta 1967, 10–11).

[8] Cf. Thompson (1977, 275–76) and Horalek (1979) recognise the heterogeneity of genres and various levels of included forms (motifs, 'chains of motifs,' types) in Egyptian story.

has already been noticed with respect to Indian epic and the theory of the epic ritual origin (Vasil'kov 1988), Indian literature motifs had never become completely petrified, they had never detached themselves from the rite which lived, but they constantly gained new impulses from culture.

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# THE NIGHT OF ANCIENT LIGHTS: FROM INVENTION TO FESTIVALISATION

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**Introduction**

The Night of Ancient Lights is an example of an intertwined phenomenon that moved from project-based attempts to invigorate local life in Finland in 1992 to the initiation and implementation as a tradition at the grassroots level in Estonia. At the same time, it has also evolved from generalising a calendar date dedicated to history, to a message system that is part of (imagined) history, to a message that creates connections between space and history, i.e. from the Baltic Sea and Baltic Viking culture (Estonian Viking culture was important in Saaremaa and the Western coastal area, cf. Mägi 2002), to ideas about the North (belonging into the group of imaginary *Põhjala* = Scandinavia and Finland) developed in Estonia in the twentieth century. On historical anniversaries, a link is usually established with a particular event. In the case of the Night of Ancient Lights, the event establishes connections with memory and remembrance. The celebration was correlated to Viking-era customs, with the more immediate purpose of lighting bonfires along the coast of the Baltic Sea in the name of an ecologically clean sea. Today, the practice of lighting bonfires is common in Estonia, partly Finland, the coast and islands of Sweden, and the Baltic states, as well as being celebrated in some parts of the UK, Australia and North America. The rapid and recent spread of this event makes it possible to track the formation of this tradition closely. The wider spread of this celebration, however, prompts questions: What are its invariant messages? What experiences does it offer? Does a popular event have connections to the image of the individual and today's identity? The establishment and development of the celebration

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have been observed through fieldwork, questionnaires, and interviews, generating data that have been analysed together with social media photos and online video clips.

**Anniversaries Marking Historical Events**

Celebrating ancient lights and bonfires values the past and perpetuates customs as events celebrated at a particular time of year. Predictably, a large part of the Night of Ancient Lights celebration came about through a grassroots initiative and does not feature any particular community or group. This coincides with the festivalisation process, with personal, social and other event domains as well as with the event having a historical root. Festivalisation has been defined by Sala and others as a rapid expansion of the concept of festival across a wide area (Getz and Page 2016, 36; Sala, Waalwijk, Lillesøe et al. 2016, 3). These festivals are complex cultural products within the context of heritagisation.

Mainly because of the cold climate, the cycle of lighting fires is short running from St George's Day (April 23) to St John's Day, i.e. Midsummer's Day (June 24) in Estonia. In the past, and often today as well, it is relatively cold at this time of year and difficult to make a fire outside before St George's Day. Before and after St John's Day there was a busy period of farm work that limited fire-making times, as did the beginning of the so-called 'flammable period' in the forests. In the agrarian village, St George's Day was the time of burning rubbish. A fire was made on farms, with an important component being the magical activity of wolf control and scaring away other wild animals (Kõiva, Vesik and Särg 2004).

In the twentieth century, bonfires were also made on other spring holidays, for example, May 1 took over several functions from St George's Day, including the custom of making a fire.

Tartu's urban culture is inextricably linked to the student festive Walpurgis procession, in which only corporates and members of student associations participate, something that is also exciting for the city residents as a spectacle. Since the re-establishment of the Republic of Estonia, the tradition of Walpurgis Night has also included lighting a large fire in Toomeorg, which was not intended for the townspeople but again for student organisations. However, the restoration of Walpurgis Night as a student holiday also postponed the making of a fire in urban settings until April 30, as many alumni live in Tartu, and so it was practical to combine customs of days that are close together on the calendar. The central magical bonfire-making time was still Midsummer, which M. J. Eisen (1899) characterised as follows:

> … St John's Day arrived, then we looked at the highest hill near the manor.[1] A long pole was set up there as well as a tar barrel or tar bucket. The barrel or bucket was stuffed full of chippings and a fire was lit. The greater the fire, the greater the joy.

[1] The manors were nationalised in 1918, so the parties patronised by the manors came to an end.

> The manor then brought out a long-promised barrel of vodka, set it up and gave everyone a glass, although the women were only worth a beer. It was a joy promised throughout the rest of the year. When the jugs were distributed, songs started to be played.
>
> A little away from the Midsummer fire, a musician sat on top of a stone or a tree stump and played the bagpipes so that his eyes poked out of his head. Hearing the sound of the instrument, the second group of young folks began to dance, dancing the old "land-waltz." The dance had to go very smoothly and along the ground, that's why it got the name "land-waltz." In the third group, the older people were sitting, having a sweet conversation, and waiting for the vodka, while the girls were singing.

However, this description is from a time just before major changes in the evolving tradition: at the time of the establishment of the republic, in 1918, manors were transferred or nationalised, manor lands were redistributed, taverns were closed by a new monopoly law in 1900 and turned into eateries.[2] But the fires for settlement, village or town with music, dance and entertainment continued under the guidance of local secular authorities. Also, the custom of making a private fire at farms, houses or summer cottages, in a suitable place in nature, continued. A common town fire is a possibility for musicians, but also for catering. St John's Saturday included other important events: cemetery holidays and remembrance of the departed, and taking a Midsummer sauna. It was more important to light a fire during the shortest night of the year when close relatives and parents (or children) were visiting. The largest and most magnificent fires in the coastal villages were made from old fishing boats, and in some places, a tar barrel was set on fire at the top of a wooden bar. As we see, making bonfires is the native part of outdoor celebrations.

**Why Create a Night of Ancient Lights in Estonian Calendar Customs?**

Estonia's living calendar tradition underwent major changes during the twentieth century. Due to rapid urbanisation and technical innovations, agrarian holidays had begun to lose their significance and only about a dozen anniversaries had retained their significance or adapted to urban conditions. New transnational inventions added secular or global celebrations such as Earth Day, Water Day, and St Valentine's Day as a friendship day (Vesik 2016) with some reinvented holidays celebrating the traditions and feasts of kin. In addition to Mother's and Father's Day, Estonia was one of the few countries that started celebrating Grandparents' Day in 2013.

Sporadic summer celebrations were related to the popularity of family celebrations and family history, i.e. the compilation of family trees with the help of the Estonian

[2] At the end of the seventeenth century, almost every manor in Estonia had its own tavern, some had several. There may have been at least 500 town taverns at that time. The heyday of taverns in present-day Estonia was in the nineteenth century: In 1895, there were 1,448 taverns in the Estonian province and about the same number in Livonia. In around 1900, the taverns in the Estonian and Livonian provinces were closed due to the Liquor Monopoly Act. The buildings were used for vodka shops, snack bars, community houses, etc.

Historical Archives.[3] The compiled family trees, together with other data, were published and distributed among the kin group in the early twentieth century, or later after the 1960s. These self-made manuscripts with data from different archives, oral history and folklore pieces brought fun and surprise – lived histories, jokes, and past tragedies, and how people coped with them. The manuscripts were compiled as data collection or chronicle. People read them before and after the meeting. Family reunions and coming together are still popular, for example, near the earliest farm mentioned in the chronicle or in a place of natural beauty. According to good practice, relatives come from all over the world, i.e. family members living abroad also join in. In addition to some presentations and cultural entertainment, there were speeches, dancing, games, tours, fires and, of course, the exchange of all kinds of news.

Professional feasts, which were added during the Soviet period (after the 1960s), like Theatre Day, Miners Day, Fishermen's Day, etc., have a history of half a century. There are also inventions from minority and spiritual groups, and partly also a festivalisation of their event (cf. Sala et al. 2016; Abbasian and Lundberg 2020; Amila Indika 2023). Several smaller ethnic groups celebrate Mari Hero's Day or *Mari taleške keče*, (April 26, celebrated since 1991); Saami Day (February 6, commemorating the first joint gathering of Saami in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia in 1971), Erzya and Moksha Language Day (April 16, celebrated since 1993). Participation in such days was important to keep the ancient tradition and culture alive and to maintain the ancestors' legacy and transfer it to the next generation in the host society (cf. Attanasi et al. 2013, 27, 227ff.). One function of the celebration of ethnic cultural festivals is to be recognised by the host society. Other important motivators are gathering family members or friends in order to celebrate happily together.

Time, as well as socio-economic conditions, was also important and changes in the use of time. The summer period includes a few traditional holidays and celebrations, with urban holidays and leisure time also falling largely in the summer months of July and August. The summer period is densely packed with cultural summer events.

Every celebration or event needs favourable conditions to survive, and this is also true of the Night of Ancient Lights, which takes place at the end of August. This position at the end of summer and beginning of autumn, when summer holidays end and school begins again, gives this celebration the character of a transitional rite. From the outset celebration of the ancient lights (bonfires) as an event had a definite date, i.e. the last Saturday in August, a time when basically everyone has a free weekend.

## The Beginning of the Night of Ancient Lights in 1992 and Later

The feast has a mixture of private, national and ancient motifs, which suit different groups. One of the main functions is leisure and pleasure – the event offers opportunities to be with loved ones, friends and family in nature, or to visit the closest official cultural event (in many settlements, larger events and village feasts are organised, and branded).

[3] This was popular in the 1960s and 1970s, the movement was typical to the 1930s.

This accomplishes an important goal for holidays today in that the event is a diverse gathering that offers good music and pleasurable pastimes.

The Night of Ancient Lights has no dress code and at private events the structure is free, so people dress appropriately for late August, their own initiatives adding to the event music making or visiting some of the larger official events. The media, too, have become important for publicity for the event, which is popularised by all the major, and some entertainment, radio stations, the Journalists' Association, some museums, and other institutions.

The beginning of the tradition is quite well documented through interviews. The Night of Ancient Lights was introduced as an old Viking-era practice of marking the shipping lanes in the Turku archipelago. In 700, Egyptian sailors called the Turku archipelago the Fire Coast. There are records elsewhere showing that lights were used to signal dangers and send signals. In addition, the Finns used this event to mark a number of anniversaries, for example, 1992 was the 75th anniversary of the Republic of Finland and the 40th anniversary of the Nordic Council, which is why bonfires were lit on August 29 at 21:30. Estonians too had good reasons to unite and light the fires. Thus, the first event has a strong political orientation as well as encouraging Finland to support neighbouring states as part of a common cultural circle.

Another important aspect of this event is the fact that "thousands of inland people whose summer houses are in the archipelago are expected to return to the archipelago in the evening, with local societies and clubs organising concerts and other cultural events: people dance and do business and have fun by the campfire" (Hiiumaa 1992). So, the Finns reflect the interests of local authorities and their efforts to revitalise trade and life in the archipelago. Estonians add new arguments: "Today at 9.30 pm an Ancient Light is lit on the Tahkuna peninsula to symbolise the Estonians' attempt to return to the Nordic countries and the ties between Hiiumaa and Kemiö" (EFITA 75-30).

From memories, we know that the Estonian National Independence Party and the story of the Night of the Ancient Lights are discussed by the campfire. The organisers of the event expressed a political aspect as well as certain aspirations that are similar to the national narrative, i.e. that Estonia is one of the Nordic states.

There is even a rather patriotic turn: "On this evening, everyone can make a fire and think about Estonia, the Nordic countries, the Vikings, everyday life, the future of Estonia and their role in society" (Saue 1992). The whole event thus ends with an emphasis on the national and the personal.

A small number of activists played a key role in establishing the custom. According to a source, the author of the idea of the Night of Ancient Lights was Birgitta Bröckl, a Finnish Swede who was the Turku Culture Commissioner (*Culture Ombudsman*) from 1984 to 2003. She called on everyone to light a fire on the coast on the last Saturday in August.

Väino Poikalainen, a founder of the Estonian Ancient Arts Society, was also associated with the Finnish Society of Ancient Culture and Rock Art from the early 1980s and was asked for advice on whether such ancient customs were also present in Estonia. In a letter to Hirvepark, an NGO, he answered:

> In ancient times, there was already a unified lookout system along the Swedish and Finnish coasts, from the open sea to the hinterland. Each coastal community had to make a fixed contribution and had a fairly strict punishment for not notifying. I as the member from the Ancient Art Society consider it probable that a similar arrangement of signal lights was also used on the Estonian coast (EFITA-75-3).

**Environmental Attitudes**

Gradually, the popularity of the event grew, and by the end of the twentieth century, the Night of the Ancient Lights was widely known, with fires being lit in coastal areas, as well as in many places inland, mainly by water bodies. However, the twenty-first century also saw the emergence of official events alongside private celebrations. The festival-like official events with an emphasis on companies, village associations and NGOs being involved. Larger events require infrastructure, and the involvement of cultural personnel and managers leads to the inclusion of music and catering bringing significant changes in the dynamics of the event.

Articles and interviews by journalists repeated and related to identity: Estonians as a seafaring nation, the Viking Age in which we had an important role and a reason to be proud of our bravery (Mägi 2002; Kõiva and Vesik 2005; Kõiva 2006), pride in our history and nature.

For example, we chose a Põlva event in 2007 where the plans of the parliament, and the intentions of the city government in relation to education, the economy and the countryside were represented, in addition to which there were presentations on esotericism and folklore – a combination of topics that are thought to be attractive and important to the local people. Member of the Estonian Parliament Ester Tuiksoo talked about her vision of the countryside and Estonianness, and the mayor of Põlva Tarmo Tamm about local plans. The cultural aspects of the event were in the hands of Leevi Lillemäe, an esoteric healer, and folklorist Mare Kõiva. Lillemäe introduced her teaching about the interconnectedness of nature and culture, and how thoughts and activities influence the lifecycle of every person. Kõiva spoke about the sauna culture and the sauna as a place for treatment, including discussion of local versions and attitudes.

There was also a short folk dance performance, after which local residents took turns spontaneously to come to the microphone and express their good wishes for their loved ones and the community, creating a bridge between an event distinguished by organised infrastructure and a private event.

Undoubtedly, the most attractive part of the evening was lighting candles and setting them to float on the lake water. Hundreds of candles floating on a lake on a dark night is an indescribably beautiful sight.

The main tendencies in the twenty-first century related to major environmental campaigns, with the more immediate purpose of lighting fires along the coast of the Baltic Sea being in the name of an ecologically clean sea. The Environmental Investment Centre declared clearly: “Don’t use pyrotechnics or sky lanterns – if you want to burn your money, donate it to charity” (EFITA 75-008). The Centre also started a campaign of

collecting burnt aluminium candle cups in order to raise money for children, collecting 1.5 million cups, i.e. 2.1 tonnes of aluminium.

The period of developing the Night of Ancient Lights came at the time of the turn towards nature conservation and this began to limit the possibilities of creating a celebration. The widespread use of sky lanterns at private parties, public events and concerts resulted in a surprising amount of candles being collected from the beaches raising the question of whether these advertised environment-friendly materials would bio-degrade rather than litter the surroundings. It is appropriate to remember that we create and consume objects that pollute nature:

> Hiiumaa, for example, has a beach where, after a few summer events in Denmark and southern Sweden, the waste of sky lanterns and the remnants of helium balloons accumulates. And this is not the only such place in the Baltic Sea. After the Night of Ancient Lights, the sea has carried back to Pärnu Beach wire scraps with paper waste left over from sky lanterns. You can complain about that, but we actually threw that junk there ourselves. (Vaik 2014a)

The reminder to donate money to charity followed current social trends. The movement against plastic bags and the communal spring rubbish collection actions called *Let's Do It* started on May 3, 2008. In the first action, around 50,000 volunteers from all over Estonia removed almost 10,000 tons of rubbish. The movement has now acquired an international dimension and is being carried out in about a hundred countries. In addition to the four original members of the team, there is strong media and economic support.

**Event Structure**

Previously, there was talk of people promoting the custom and helping to develop it. One of the initiators, Mairold Vaik, a sailor, formulated some rules:

> [We] invite you to fill the shores of the Baltic Sea with lights so that at least two other fires can be seen from each place..The Night of Ancient Lights is a good tradition to come to the sea on the last Saturday of August, light a fire and look at yourself. Feel unity with all the other people through the distant lights and think good and positive thoughts together.' (Tamm 2010; Vaik 2014b).

Soon afterwards, the capital started to organise a cultural day filled with concerts by professional musicians, and exhibitions. Events lasted all day and included the possibility to visit the Seaplane Harbour, to light fires and watch over them for the evening. However, it has also been possible to meet ghosts in the city at night, for example during evening hikes, which are free (Maran 2019). Ghost trips and history trips are now an established model of urban tourism, something that has come to Estonia from Great Britain.

At the same time, it is clear that when a culture specialist or librarian creates a cultural event it is not constrained by a lack of imagination. In one northern county, a trip was

planned that included a bus trip and a campfire in the cultural shrine built on the land of poet A. H. Tammsaare's birthplace (Tammsaare Museum 2010). Of particular interest here is that a connection has been established between the cultural shrine and the local nature with large trees, stones and wetlands.

**Ancient Lights Celebrated Elsewhere**

It is obvious that it makes sense to light fires in many countries around the Baltic Sea in order to have greater coverage. Currently, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania participate, and celebrations can be found in Australia, New Zealand, and North America, partly as the event of Estonians (and Baltic people), and partly as the event by fans and followers of Viking culture.

Migration and former colonies are a common way that cultural events are disseminated, for example, the Twelfth of July in Ireland spread in the same way, and there are notable other trends as well, such as Orangewomen Lodges, which have paraded on the Twelfth of July in some areas since at least the mid-twentieth century, or longer and they were banned from the Belfast parades in the 1990s. We can find the same parade in Canada, where its popularity has fallen since the 1970s, while there is a new rise in popularity in Australia.

This raises the question of the development of the Night of Ancient Lights since the first bonfires on the coasts of Finland and Estonia in 1992:

- Late 1990s – enthusiasts create the modern event; there are a few hundred participants.
- Early 2000s – the event is spread by enthusiasts and organisers of cultural events; there are thousands of participants.
- 2009–2015 – active advertising; there are ca. 10,000 or more participants.
- 2018 – more than 900 registered bonfires with 31,000 registered participants; there are more than 10 concerts; there is a grand total of almost 100,000 participants.

The Night of the Ancient Lights was on the list of celebrations of Estonia's centenary as an independent country, it ensured wider dissemination of information and an interactive map application, for which bonfires can be registered and thus others without a bonfire can be invited to join.

Another innovation was a common topic of discussion proposed, from which the team hoped that the idea of a developing citizens' initiative would be taken forward. In 2017, the small group of enthusiasts declared:

> In 2017, the Night of Ancient Lights team focuses on the future of the Estonian state and dreaming together. The team invites everyone to discuss the future of Estonia and to write down dreams that are born during the discussions. Estonian Future Stories is a discussion period that takes place from August to November, when ideas are exchanged on topics important to the Estonian society and people. The aim of collecting stories is to develop a

> culture of discussion in Estonia, to initiate new activities that are useful for society and to bring together different ideas, people and dreams (EFITA-75-2).

This is not completely new, it was new in the early 1990s, but since the start of the current decade state TV has hosted weekly discussions on social topics, in addition to which opinion festivals have taken place in Paide, in Central Estonia, in August. The advantage of the Night of Ancient Lights is that each group can find a suitable outcome and discuss the topics that speak to them. But do you necessarily want to generate ideas by the campfire? This is an emotionally extraordinary situation – dark nights blanketed by stars and the sea (or other bodies of water) create a special atmosphere.

There are various ways in which people ritualise their practices (cf. Lukken 2005; Grimes 2013) including by traditionalising, repeating, and situating them in specific places and times, the Night of Ancient Lights helps to channel feelings and emotions, expressing ideas and ideals, but also coping with contingency, and creating identity on an individual and community level.

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# BOYS' CHANTS AT *OIDHCHE CHALLAINN* (NEW YEAR'S EVE) ON BERNERAY IN THE OUTER HEBRIDES

Emily Lyle*

I have enjoyed a shared interest in seasonal house-visiting performances with Terry Gunnell and I was delighted to contribute an article on 'Galoshins' to his book *Masks and Mumming in the Nordic Area* (Lyle 2007). 'Galoshins' was a little play performed in Scotland by boys at Halloween or Hogmanay and this was an English-language tradition. Speakers of Scottish Gaelic had a separate tradition where rhymes were chanted at the New Year. This Gaelic tradition varied from place to place and over the course of time, but I have taken as the focus of this study of the custom the island of Berneray and, in particular, the memories of Roderick MacKillop (1916–1999; TaD 5565), a native of the island. Roddy was a seaman who emigrated to Australia in 1947 (HC 104775; SA1977.38.B13) and I recorded him in Sydney in 1977.

Berneray, which is three and a half miles long by two miles broad (5.6km by 3.2km), lies between Harris and North Uist in the Outer Hebrides. It is attached administratively to Harris but is nearer to North Uist and has been joined to it by a causeway since 1999.

A fine study of life on Berneray, mainly as it was in the early 1970s, has recently been published by Susanne Barding, a Danish anthropologist now living in the Faroe Islands (Barding 2023). The people of the island fell into two divisions, those of Ruisgarry in the north and of Borve in the south and there was considerable conflict between them (Barding 2023, 463–65). A focal point of island life, the United Free Presbyterian Church with its manse where the minister lived, was on a hill between the two (Barding 2023, 418, 423). Gaelic was the primary language spoken on the island (Barding 2023, 18, 191).

When I encountered Roddy, I was recording Scottish traditions in Australia for the School of Scottish Studies Archives at the University of Edinburgh and one of my colleagues at the School was Ian Paterson (1916–1990; Barding 2023, 508) who came from

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Berneray and is mentioned by Roddy in the conversation transcribed below which was recorded on 27 February 1977. Angus MacKenzie (b. 1917; TaD 6328), a Gaelic-speaking friend of Roddy's who came from Lewis and had a deep interest in Celtic culture, was also present during the session.

*Oidhche Challainn* was a major event in island life. Roddy commented, "We used to look forward to it the whole year." (SA1977.45.A3b). It is the subject of a Gaelic-language film made by the Berneray Historical Society (*Oidhche Challuinn* 2007) as well as of a number of recordings available online in *Tobar an Dualchais* / *Kist o' Riches*. This article does not aim to provide full coverage of the island tradition but takes up a few points arising from Roddy's lively account which is given from the point of view of a boy in a house-visiting gang. The boys at this time did not wear masks or dress up. Roddy was aware of the use of cardboard masks and dressing up later (as illustrated in Barding 2023, 551) but, concerning his own experience, he recalls: "We just used to go out in our ordinary school clothes – there was no school uniforms then." (SA1977.39.B9).

Roddy was a pupil at Berneray School between 1922 and 1930 (HC 104775). The school day finished at 4 pm and sunset came shortly after that. The boys were going around in twilight and in the dark and Roddy commented that "very often it would be a wet night" (SA1977.45.A3b). The island tradition kept to Old New Year as celebrated before the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in Britain in 1752 with its omission of eleven days. Old New Year's Day (*Callainn*) was on the 12th of January and the house-visiting took place on its eve (*Oidhche Challainn*) on 11th January as part of its celebration. The first of two extracts from Roddy's account runs as follows (SA1977.39.A4):

> *Roderick MacKillop*: On the 12th of January we used to go around after the school, all the boys from our end of the island, the Borve boys, and the others were from Ruisgarry – that's Ian Paterson's end – we all used to carry a pillowslip and go round the houses, and we used to have a rhyme we used to say in Gaelic . . . I might even remember part of the rhyme we used to say: [Three verses beginning: *Sinn a-nochd a' dol a Challainn/ Dh'innse do mhnathan a' bhaile*, Tonight we are going out for Hogmanay/ To tell the women of the village.] Well, Ian Paterson's end, that's the Ruisgarry end, there the rhyme used to be different to ours . . . There's a boundary between Ruisgarry and Borve and . . . we took it that the manse, the minister, belonged to our side being on our side of the fence – there was no fence but just a wall there – but the Ruisgarry boys very often used to beat us because we used to have to come further from school home, like. By the time we got home and got together the Ruisgarry boys were already home and gone together and gone to the manse – you always used to get money from there, and they used to beat us to it all the time. Of course, in later years the ministers were a bit more – what do you call it? – giving away a bit more of their money than they used to, leave a bit for the Berneray [meaning 'Borve'] boys too. And when you got something at the house, you used to say, and this is in Gaelic:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *Guma fada beò sibh is ceò às ur taigh* | Long may you live and have smoke (coming) from your house |
> | *'S nuair thig sinn an rathad* | And when we come this way |
> | *Tadhailidh sinn a-staigh*. | We will call in. |

And if you didn't get anything – I don't know whether I should put it on it, it was a bit rude, what we used to say – wait a minute –:

| | |
|---|---|
| *An fheadhainn nach toir dhuinn a' Challainn* | Those who won't give us the Hogmanay |
| *Sgrìobadh an fheannag an tòn.* | May the crow scratch their backside. |

That's only for Gaelic speakers to hear anyway but they deserved it for not giving us anything! [laughter] The first one was "May you live long, *Guma fada beò* –, May you live long and your chimney, the smoke coming from your chimney, and when I come this way, I'll call in to see you." . . . But that's what we used to say if they gave us anything but if they didn't – those that don't give us anything – well, in other words, "We hope that the crows will come and pick your eyes," but that's not what it says in Gaelic [laughter] but that's just more or less what you can say in English . . .

There was [one woman] give us an empty box, supposed to be a cake box, and when we got into the next house – of course they always say, "What did they give you in the last house?" "Oh, we got a cake in the last house." Of course, when the box was open there was nothing in it. Of course, there was a bit of a hullabaloo and the fellow whose house we were in – he was a Ferguson – he wanted us to go back and do all kinds of things but na, we forgot it. But he says, "If I was young, I'd be going back and letting them know what it's all about!" Fancy giving us an empty box! . . .

When you leave Berneray to come, like I did, like, years and years ago, a lot of these things mean quite a lot to me but to those that stayed on the island they more or less have forgotten about it for they're getting something like that all the time and they're forgetting about the past but to me the things that happened when I was there, I'll never forget them. So that's how I remember a few of these things.

*EL*: I don't know if I quite understand it about getting to the minister's first. Did he only give to one group?

*RM*: Originally, yes. It depended on the minister. In the latter years, they used to give it to both of us . . . Whoever came first, that was it. They got it. Of course, we used to come and sing our whatever you call it, our *callainn* (*EL*: Was that actually sung?) Pardon? (*EL*: Was that rhyme sung?) Yeah well, just like, no, just like I was saying it, everybody together *Sinn a-nochd a' dol a Challainn*/*Dh'innse do mhnathan a' bhaile*. It used to be like a song, like. You could hear the chanting, you could hear it half-way through the island. And, of course, they used to come out and, "Oh, the Ruisgarry boys have been here. We've got nothing for you." That was it. Of course, we used to sing then, well, *An fheadhainn nach toir dhuinn a' Challainn*/*Sgrìobadh an fheannag an tòn*. We didn't care whether they were a minister's wife! It was quite rude, really, but anyway I think they deserved it!

*EL*: Did you go all over the island?

*RM*: All over the island.

*EL*: So you went to the other half?

*RM*: We had the Borve half, and the other boys had the Ruisgarry half. Of course, if there were houses that were a bit far away – if you were there last year, which would be every year, and we didn't get much, they'd say, "Well, it's not worth wetting our feet going to see so-and-so, we'll just skip them." We more or less used to pick where you thought you'd get something worth your while. Oh, they used to give you butter and cakes. Of course, the money was more welcome. We'd just buy lollies or sweets as we call it. But that's *Oidhche na Callainn*.

*EL*: So the manse was the only house that both groups visited?

*RM*: The manse was the only place, yes. Later on . . . The Post Office was on the other side of the line and our boys got a bit cunning because we heard that they were quite generous too so if we could hear the Ruisgarry boys at the manse we used to go straight to the Post Office and beat them that way.
*EL*: Sounds like a bit of poaching! [laughter]
*RM*: But it took us quite a while before – they used to keep quiet about what they got at the Post Office – you always kept quiet what you got you see – but they got to find out what we got at the manse and when we heard what they were getting in the Post Office that's when we used to go up, poach on them. If we could hear them at the manse, we went to the Post Office.

Roddy speaks of going around during his school days, perhaps from age ten to age fourteen in 1926 to 1930. The minister he referred to is the Rev. Norman Morrison (b. 1874), who was in the parish from 1917 to 1927 and was married to Annabella Macdonald (Scott 1928, 188; HC70641). It should be said, on behalf of the minister and his wife, that traditionally each house would have had only one visit which, when gifts were made, was held to secure good fortune for the year ahead. This assumes a situation where territories were sharply defined and distributed among the gangs. In looser conditions, in the 'Galoshins' case, some households welcomed a series of performances throughout the evening while others accepted only the first group of boys who offered to act (Lyle 2011, 16).

The Berneray boys evidently shouted out their rhyme as they stood outside the houses for, as Roddy commented: "You could hear it half-way through the island." Roddy was aware of the rhyme as heightened speech which he referred to as "singing" but there was no tune and the word "chanting" is more appropriate. Roddy later in the conversation recalled the whole of his rhyme as given below (SA1977.39.B6-B6a). The delivery was fast, vigorous and rhythmical and took 33 seconds.

*RM*: This is, as far as I can remember, the rhyme we used to chant:

| | |
|---|---|
| [1] *Sinn a-nochd a' dol a Challainn* | Tonight we are going out for Hogmanay |
| *Dh'innse do mhnathan a' bhaile* | To tell the women of the village |
| *Gur e màireach Latha Nollaig.* | That tomorrow is Christmas Day. |
| | |
| [2] *Daoine bochd a' dol a dholaidh* | Poor people in want |
| *Seastan silean beag buntàta* | Shout for little seed potatoes |
| *'S duilleag chàil an dèidh a phrannadh.* | And a pounded cabbage leaf. |
| | |
| [3] *Chaidh mi timcheall an taighe* | I went round the house |
| *'S bhuail òrdag mo choiseadh* | And stubbed my toe |
| *Ann an aodann na cloicheadh.* | On the face of the stone. |
| | |
| [4] *Siud an leagail a bha trom* | That was a heavy fall. |
| *Chaidh mo leagail anns a' pholl* | I fell down in the mud. |
| *B'fheàrr leam làn mo dhùirn de dh'ìm* | I would rather a fistful of butter |
| *Na uiread mo chinn den òr.* | Than the size of my head in gold. |

| | |
|---|---|
| [5] *Thèid sinn a-null gu Maighstir Ùisdean* | We will go over to Rev Hugh |
| *'S sùil againn gu faigh sinn drama* | And expect to get a dram |
| *'S à sin gu daoine còir* | And from there to kindly folk |
| *Is bidh an stòr againn nas pailte.* | And our haul will be bigger. |
| | |
| [6] *Gabhaidh sinn an t-aran leis an ìm* | We will take the bread with the butter |
| *'S gabhaidh sinn an t-ìm leis an aran* | And we'll take the butter with the bread |
| *'S gabhaidh sinn an càise leis fhèin* | And we'll take the cheese on its own |
| *'S carson a-rèist a bhiomaid falamh?* | Why then would we be hungry? |

All we had to do then was hang around . . . Some used to keep us waiting while they got ready what they were going to give us; they'd just open the door and hand it to you. And others used to let you come in and have a talk to you. And we used to get home-made scones or cakes, butter, jam, tea, anything just for the party for the night but of course we used to be after money more than anything but there wasn't too much money going these days. And after the night was over, or after we finished our collecting, we used to go to a special pre-arranged house and the lady of the house used to put on the kettle, make the tea and we used to have quite a nice supper there. And after that the spoil was divided between us, money and all, and that was the night, and that was what we used to call *Oidhche Challuinn* on the 12th of January.
*EL*: Did you ever have any idea who made up the chant?
*RM*: No, we never. Many's the time since then I've been thinking about it but when you were young you just weren't worried about these things. You just took it for granted that that's been going on for years and years.

The accuracy of Roddy's memory of the rhyme he chanted is confirmed by the record from Mary MacAskill, née Ferguson (1920–2019; TaD 7258; Barding 2023, 171–86), who remembered the same six verses except that she did not have the second half of verse 4. Girls did not go house-visiting during this period, but she came to know the rhyme by "hearing it every year" as she remarked (SA 1977.132.A9). She was just four years younger than Roddy and could have heard chanting by a group that included him.

Three of Roddy's verses (1, 2 and 6) were included in the brief reminiscence in Gaelic by Angus MacKillop (1907–1977; TaD 5075; Barding 2023, 312) which relates to the custom a decade before Roddy's experience.

*Angus MacKillop*: On the eleventh day after New Year, we would go round the houses, proclaiming Hogmanay. We would stand at the door and proclaim: [Rhyme]. There were a few houses which did not welcome the Hogmanay proclaimers, but most of them were very generous, giving us what they had. They didn't have much in those days, but they gave it away generously. We would then proclaim at the door as we left:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Pailteas biadh is pailteas aodach* | Plenty of food and plenty of clothing<br>May you have good health. |
| *Slàinte dhaoine gu robh agaibh.* | |

One house was set aside, and the women there prepared the Hogmanay for us. We didn't look at the clock at all. It might be morning before we went home. (SA1970.294.B9)

The blessing as recalled by Mary MacAskill (SA 1977.132.A9) began with the lines given by Roddy and concluded with these lines from Angus.

There is a blessing also in the comparable 'Galoshins' custom but there is no curse there, although the boys' displeasure if they were not made welcome might take physical form in such things as damage to property. Ronald Hutton, surveying New Year house-visiting practices throughout Britain in *The Stations of the Sun*, has no curses apart from those from the Gaelic tradition where he has two (Hutton 1996, 65–66), one from Skye in the Inner Hebrides, and the other published by Alexander Carmichael in *Carmina Gadelica* from an unspecified source.

A curse is mentioned but not given in the Berneray film (*Oidhche Challuinn*, 2007). Similarly, the account by the nineteenth-century folklorist, Robert Maclagan, of a recollection from North Uist from Mr D. Ferguson, exhibits avoidance of the words of the curse. The record, after giving the rhyme, continues with the entry and the blessing. The 'singing' should be understood as the rhythmical chanting already described.

> Having finished so far, the company then advance to the door singing – *Tha mise dol a steach an so, is dorus fosgailte* (I am going in here, the door is open). They then go in, and the matron of the house presents them with some of her bannocks for which they return thanks as follows:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *Guma maith a theid leibh fein,* | May it be well with you, |
> | *'S leis an tealach, 's leis a chlann:* | And with the household, and with the children, |
> | *Is gu robh sith agus sonas,* | And may peace, and happiness, |
> | *Agus soirbheachadh leibh aig na h-uile am.* | And prosperity abide with you always. |
>
> Should any one refuse to give them anything, which seldom happens, they signify their displeasure by erecting a heap of stones outside the door. This is called *carn nam mollachd*, upon which, before taking their departure, the youths consider it right enough, in the circumstances, to pronounce, often in pretty pronounced terms, their ill wishes for the matron who has failed, as they think, in the duty of courtesy towards them. The reciter says that people are very much afraid of the *carn nam mollachd*, and he confesses that for his own part, he would give them something, were it for no other reason than to avoid their *mollachd*
> (Maclagan 3687–88).

Peggy MacDonald from South Uist, in a recording made by Calum Maclean in 1958, mentioned the cairn of curses in her account of the New Year custom and also gave the words of the curse she knew (Calum Maclean Database, uk024-01-30):

> *'S duine nach toireadh dhaibh a' Chulaig, bha iad a' togail càrnan mu choinneamh an doruis – carnan na mallachd:*
>
> *Ma's a miosa 'm bliadhna, gur a sheachd miosa 'n ath bhliadhna!*
>
> And a person who would not give them the Hogmanay, they built a cairn opposite their door – the cairn of curses:
>
> If this year is really bad, may next year be seven times worse.

Maclean had also recorded in 1946 the 'crows' curse given by Roddy from Malcolm MacLean who belonged to the island of Raasay in the Inner Hebrides (Calum Maclean Database, ei1026-27-17):

*Nuair nach fhaigheadh iad bannag chanadh iad:*
*Is gach té nach- tòir dhomh bannag,*
*Sgrìobaidh an fheannag a rùsan.*

When they didn't get a bannock they would say:
Every woman who won't give me a bannock,
May the crow scratch her stumpy tail.

A note at *rùsan* in Maclean's manuscript glosses the euphemistic 'stumpy tail' as *tòn* meaning 'behind.' This is the word that Roddy was hesitant about recording but, luckily for the accuracy of the record, he overcame his reluctance and gave the unvarnished curse although he would not translate it exactly for me.

A dictionary definition of *càrn nam mallachd* speaks of a Hogmanay cairn that was "built to shame households which did not give gifts" to the house-visitors (*Am Faclair Beag*). This emphasises the social aspect, but there was more to it than that. The words spoken were reinforced by the physical action. Full ritual performance took the form of things said and things done and Roddy had only half of the curse ritual that consisted of the words spoken. Roddy also had the words "I went round the house" but there was no accompanying action; the boys just stood at the door and did not circle. For the actions that at one time accompanied the words of blessing and curse, it is possible to turn to Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*. Referring back to a period when the fire was in the middle of the floor, Carmichael comments that the blessing is given while the guisers walk sunwise round the fire but adds, "Should the guisers be inhospitably treated, they file round the fire withershins and walk out, and raise a cairn in or near the door, called 'carnan mollachd,' 'cairn of malison,' 'carnan cronachd,' 'scath cairn.'" (1900, 156–57).

The action of blessing at this earlier period, though apparently not in Roddy's time, included the action of passing a burning piece of sheepskin sunwise round the people of the house. There is an account of this in the rhyme given below which came from Mary MacAskill's brother, Iain or John Ferguson (1921–88; TaD 5975; HC 70549; Barding 2023: 92–145).

Iain, who lived at 16 Borve, was well known as a tradition bearer. He did not take part in the house-visiting custom himself since his parents would not allow it (SA1979.085). They clearly categorised it as disapproved begging instead of as a custom that belonged to the community as a whole. Brian Hayward notes the change in the understanding of the annual custom from an equal exchange between the householders and the luck-bringers to one where the visitors were regarded as inferiors who were stigmatised as beggars and he sees this as a major reason for its decline (Hayward 1992, 31–36). When the custom was in full force, both rich and poor took part in the house-visiting. As a member of the luck-bringing gang, Roddy took on the persona of a beggar

although he was not poor. Even without any masking, the boys were distinguished from their everyday selves.

Although Iain Ferguson did not participate, he took a keen interest in the custom and acquired a version of the rhyme when he had just left school (that is, about 1935) from Ann Paterson, née MacLeod (1866–1941), his neighbour at 15 Borve who "was regarded as Berneray's finest folklorist of the day" (HC 72895). She was brought up in Sandhill in the Ruisgarry end of the island and it seems that this was a Ruisgarry version that might have had some similarity to the one known to the Ruisgarry boys that Roddy mentioned. However, it may well date from Ann's girlhood about 1880 and, in that case, allowance would have to be made for change over the course of time. This version contains an account of the sheepskin which, in the nineteenth century, was probably accompanied by the action referred to (SA 1981.073):

| | |
|---|---|
| [1] *Mise seo a' seinn mu dhuanag làidir* | I'm here singing my mighty song |
| *A bhuain mo sheanar.* | That came from my grandfather. |
| *Cha ruig mi leas a dhol ga innse;* | I don't need to explain; |
| *Bha i ann o linn nach can mi.* | It's been around longer than I can say. |
| | |
| [2] *Craiceann Callainn na mo phòcaid* | The Hogmanay skin in my pocket |
| *'S math a' cheò thig às an fhear ud.* | Will produce good smoke. |
| *Gheibh fear an taighe na làimh i* | The man of the house will get it in his hand |
| *'S sparraidh e ceann dhan an teallach.* | And he'll push the end into the hearth. |
| | |
| [3] *Theid i deiseal air na pàistean* | It will go sunwise round the children |
| *Ach gu h-àraid gheibh a' bhean i* | But the wife, especially, will get it. |
| *Gheibh a' bhean i, 's i as fhiach e* | The wife will get it, she deserves it |
| *'S i làmh-riarachadh na Callainn.* | She shares out the Hogmanay. |
| | |
| [4] *Ach bhon tha tartadh air na dùthcha* | But as there is a drouth in the country |
| *Cha bhi dùil againn ri drama.* | We won't expect a dram. |
| *Ach beagan a thochraidhean an t-samhraidh* | But a little of the summer's bounty |
| *Tha sinn an geall orr' leis an aran.* | We like it with the bread. |
| | |
| [5] *Cha ghabh sinn an t-aran gun an t-ìm* | We won't take the bread without the butter |
| *'S cha ghabh sinn an t-ìm gun an t-aran.Ach gabhaidh sinn an càise leis fhèin* | And we won't take the butter without the bread.<br>But we will take the cheese on its own |
| *'S tuig a-rèist a bhiomaid falamh?* | Why then would we be hungry? |
| | |
| [6] *'S ma tha sin againn ri fhaotainn* | And if that is available to us |
| *Ma dh'fhaoidte na cumaibh maill' orr'.* | Maybe don't delay it. |

Iain Ferguson also had two separate verses that he knew were ascribed to the poet Malcolm MacAskill (1818–1903) who belonged to Ruisgarry (Morrison 1958; HC 105243). The reference in the first verse is to the Rev. Hugh MacDonald (1822–88) who was minister in Berneray from 1852 to 1878 when the church was at Lag a' Chealla in Ruisgarry (Scott 1928, 188, 198; Barding 416, 418). He was unmarried and his niece Marion MacPherson (b. c. 1835; HC 70356) served as his housekeeper. Her generosity is proclaimed in the second verse. The first of the two verses is included in Roddy's version, preserving a topical allusion of no later than 1878 in a chant performed in 1930.

| | |
|---|---|
| *A' tighinn suas gu Maighstir Ùisdean* | Coming up to Rev Hugh |
| *'S bidh dùil againn ri drama.* | And we'll expect a dram. |
| *Às a sin gu daoine còir* | From there to kindly folk |
| *Aig a bheil an stòr nas pailte.* | Who have more in store. |
| | |
| *Bidh mi 'g iomradh fhad 's is beò mi* | I will tell for as long as I live |
| *Coibhneas Mòr, Nighean 'ic a' Phearsain* | Of the kindness of Marion MacPherson |
| *Làmh gun ghainne, cridhe fialaidh* | An open hand, a generous heart |
| *An t-àm bhi riaghladh.* | When it was time to share out. |

(SA1979.085)

I am well aware that there is much more to be said about this thriving island tradition, but I have done my best within the limits of this short article to give some impression of the chants themselves and their performance and of the community network involved in maintaining them.

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# MEMORY IN ACTION: NARRATION, COMMUNICATION AND THE REPERTOIRE OF A WELSH TRADITION-BEARER

Robin Gwyndaf*

The subject of this article is memory, communication, and narration, with particular reference to one noted Welsh tradition-bearer. Wales has a long and rich folk narrative tradition (Rhŷs 1901; Jones 1930; Parry 1955; Roberts 1988; Stephens 1998). There has been right down to our own day and age no shortage of brief local legends relating to the supernatural, brief socio-historical legends, and jokes and anecdotes, and the role of the ordinary storyteller in the community was and, to a very great extent, still is an important one (Gwyndaf 1987–88; 1989; 1990; 1992–93; 1994).

As part of his work in Sain Ffagan Amgueddfa Werin Cymru / St Fagans National Museum of History (near Cardiff) from 1964–2024, it was the author's particular privilege to interview ca. 4,000 individuals. From 1964–2006 some 400 were recorded on tape, amounting to 650 hours of recordings and approximately 18,000 brief items of narrative and folk belief (Gwyndaf 1993–94).

The folk narrative repertoire of one noted tradition-bearer, Lewis Thomas Evans (1882–1975), was afforded special attention. 67 hours of his oral testimony was recorded on tape and supplemented by field notebooks.

The recordings, made over a period of ten years, 1964–74, refer mainly to Lewis Evans' native district of Uwchaled, North Wales (and the author's own native district) – a predominantly Welsh-speaking, agricultural community. In the course of the study, however, much material was recorded on such folkloristic subjects as folk speech, proverbs, riddles, folk medicine, folk customs, folk beliefs, and especially folk poetry (Gwyndaf 1966; 2006), and narratives.

The types of narrative include: tales of magic (*Märchen*): 4; tales of romance (*novelle*): 6; animal tales: 1; tales of the stupid ogre: 2; *exempla*: 2; formula tales: 4; religious tales: 1; tales of humour: 62; white-lie tales: 15; myths: 2; memorates: 36; local belief legends

* St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff, Cymru / Wales.

and fabulates: 24; legends and onomastic traditions relating to antiquities, events and people within the locality: 73; legends and traditions relating to events and historical characters outside the locality: 27; humorous anecdotes relating to well-known local characters: 66; humorous anecdotes relating to untoward local incidents: 36.

Figure 1. Lewis T Evans (1882–1975), at his home: Cartref, Y Gyffylliog, North Wales, with Robin Gwyndaf, 4 May 1974. Photo: Welsh Folk Museum, St Fagans, Cardiff.

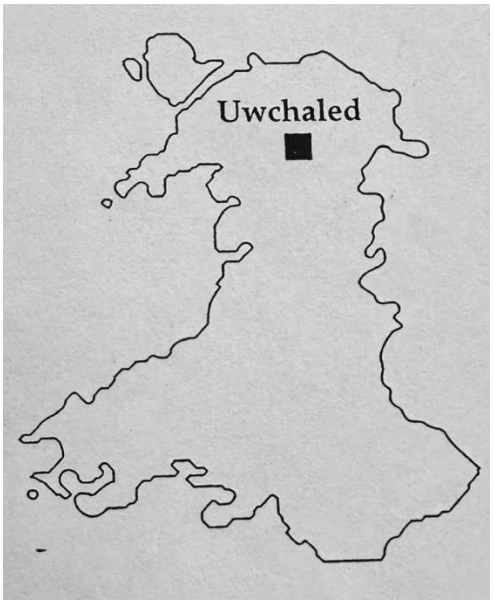


Figure 2. Map of Wales and the Uwchaled community.

In two previous articles (Gwyndaf 1976; 1981) these brief, mainly prose narratives, a total of over 350, were considered in relation to the nature of the folk narrative repertoire of a predominantly passive tradition-bearer.

The present article concentrates on an examination of the narratives with particular reference to a narrator's memory. What vital role does memory play in determining the extent and nature of a narrator's repertoire? Without remembering the context, can a narrator always remember the text?

Which factors assist the memory and enable the narrator to re-live his tales? How does loss of memory affect narration? When a narrator forgets, is it always inevitable, or is it at times intentional? If so, why? What is the nature of the narration of a passive tradition-bearer? How does it differ from the performing skills of an active storyteller? To what extent is the process of remembering a dual activity? What is the role of the interviewer/audience in re-enacting a narrator's memory? As a contribution towards answering these and other similar questions, the following six main issues are offered for consideration:

**Memory and a Narrator's Personality, Intellect and Interests**

To what extent does a narrator's personality influence the memory and determine the range and nature of his or her folk narrative repertoire? (Bartlett 1932; Cohen 1981). To what extent is age a relevant factor? Lewis Evans was 82 years old when I first met him and 92 when the last interview was conducted. 31 of the 350 narratives were re-recorded over a period of three to eight years. There were minor changes in the narration, but they were not significant.

Lewis Evans was a rather quiet, reserved person. But people from all walks of life were attracted to him, and he took a keen interest in other people. He was also a good listener, and the art of listening is the front-door key to remembrance. He lived all his life, more or less, in the same district and knew the inhabitants well. He had during his life been a farm servant, farmer (small-holding), and forester. His numerous interests included: painting, musical instruments, and antiquities. Although he left school when he was nine years of age, he, like his parents, had always been a keen reader, in both Welsh and English. Here, therefore, the ethnologist must ask: What is the influence of booklore on folklore? At least nine items in Lewis Evans' repertoire came directly from printed sources.

In the Welsh *Trioedd Cerdd* [the poetic or song triads] we read (in translation): "Three things that give amplitude to a poet: knowledge of histories, the poetic art and old verse" (Williams and Jones 1934, 18; Bromwich 1961, lxxi). *Ystoryeau* [histories] in this context means "the national inheritance of ancient traditions" (Bromwich 1961, lxxi). The word is a late borrowing from the Latin *historia*. Lewis Evans was also a poet, and his poetry, like his folk narrative inheritance, clearly reflects his deep interest in and knowledge of the antiquities of his community and country. One sixteenth-century Welsh triad reads (in translation): "Three things pertain to the poet: poetry, memory and traditional lore" (Williams and Jones 1934, 134). Another late medieval treatise refers to the *tri chof* [the

three memories] of the bards: knowledge of history, language and genealogies (Williams 1954–55; Bromwich 1961, lxxi).

Throughout his life, Lewis Evans had made good use of his memory. He had nurtured it. He was also a good observer and interpreter of his own tradition. The early Welsh term for storyteller (who would also often combine the role of poet) was *y cyfarwydd*, which literally means 'the one who is familiar with.' His task was *cyfarwyddo*, 'to guide,' 'to direct,' 'to share with others.' Why was Lewis Evans always ready to relate to his fellow workers and neighbours that which he himself had learned since childhood? And why, during the last ten years of his life, did he so willingly and patiently listen to all my questions, and always endeavour to answer them to the best of his ability? The reason is clear. Because he was kind and considerate; because he realised that there were some things in this inheritance which were worth preserving for future generations. He was a tradition-bearer and a poet. But he was also a teacher and a friend of the people; the one who recorded the tradition and shared with others his own interpretation of this tradition. To observe and interpret is to understand; to understand is to appreciate; to appreciate is to remember.

**Memory and a Narrator's Values and World-View**

Some of the questions to be asked here are as follows: To what extent does an individual's values, character and worldview influence what a narrator wishes to forget, wishes to remember, wishes to keep privately to himself, or wishes to relate to others? (Vansina 1965) Why, and under what circumstances? (Jansen 1976; Oring 1987) Here we should mention the three dimensions which Dell Hymes (1975, 15–16) referred to as: the interpretable, the reportable and the repeatable. A fourth dimension is also relevant: what is acceptable or appropriate?

One must begin with the obvious: memory is "never neutral … or all-encompassing, it is always selective, because everything cannot be remembered anyway." What was Lewis Evans' attitude towards what he learnt, what some folklorists call 'metafolklore'? (Dundes 1966, 506; Pentikäinen 1972, 138) What values did he place on the various items in his testimony? (Malinowski 1948) He was well-respected in the community. As a practising Christian and a man of high moral standards, he had a certain status in society, a certain role to play and a certain code of conduct to live up to (Pentikäinen 1972, 136).

Not surprisingly, Lewis Evans' folk repertoire reflects his own values, attitudes and worldview. No doubt he had heard numerous obscene jokes and anecdotes. Even so, if he still remembered these obscene jokes, he had decided not to repeat them to the interviewer. There is, however, no shortage in his repertoire of narratives in which the prime function is didactic. At least 13 of his narratives criticise in a subtle manner various human sins and weaknesses. They had a specific message and a meaningful function. They seemed, somehow, however indirectly, to act as a statement on life and people's constant struggle between good and evil. They were part and parcel of his day-

to-day thoughts and feelings. They were worth remembering and repeating. They were, therefore, active in his memory.

**Memory, Source Analysis and Channels of Transmission**

From whom, where, when and in what circumstances did the narrator first hear his tales? How did this influence the process of learning and remembering? Source analysis of Lewis Evans' repertoire identifies four main social groups and tradition-bearers.

i. The family circle (71 items). There were two outstanding members in this group. First, the narrator's cultured father (21 items). Secondly, the narrator's blind uncle, his mother's brother, also called Lewis Evans (36 items).
ii. A small group of talented, self-taught antiquaries and poets (24 items).
iii. 46 various individuals (1–3 items each).
iv. Seven public figures (12 items).

The main channels of transmission – the actual situation where the informant heard his tales included: i. The family circle. ii. Everyday company of fellow workers. iii. Occasions of social cooperation between farmers. iv. Outdoor lofts where the farm servants slept. v. The smithy. vi. Occasional communal gatherings. vii. Various houses in the community where young people often met during the evenings. viii. Public occasions. ix. Fairs and markets (Ortutay 1959, 175–221; Dégh 1969, 63–119).

As Juha Pentikäinen has remarked: "the channels of transmission are the bearers of tradition" (Pentikäinen 1972, 138). The numerous channels of transmission in the Uwchaled area and the number of tradition-bearers with whom Lewis Evans was in close contact almost daily clearly help to explain why his narrative repertoire is so extensive. Storytelling was an informal, unconscious activity and an organic part of everyday life and work, conversation and gossip. By the time Lewis Evans' testimony was recorded on tape, 1964–74, the great majority of those who had first told him the narratives had died; many of the traditional channels of transmission had disappeared, and depopulation and forest plantations in the area had greatly affected the reciprocity by which each new tale once spread, almost like gossip, from person to person. Even so, while the memory of his family and close circle of neighbours and cultured friends was kept alive, and while he was able to recreate the actual occasions when he heard the tales – narration in action – he would be able to remember also a high percentage of the tales themselves and retell them once again.

It has already been mentioned that a number of narratives were first related to him because they arose naturally in the course of everyday conversation or work. An important question to be asked, therefore, when discussing memory and narration is: was there a particular reason for telling a particular story at a particular moment in time?

**Memory and Folk Memory; Personal Memory and Collective Memory**

Certain narratives in Lewis Evans' repertoire belonged mainly to the individual tradition. The majority of these included tales told to him by his father and blind uncle and the small group of cultured poets and antiquaries. Most of these items are based on international tale types and motifs, and he remembered them because he regarded them as rather 'special' and different to the numerous groups of legends and anecdotes relating to people and events within the locality. These local tales belong mainly to the collective or communal tradition. In the case of 165 items, the narrator was not able to refer specifically to the sources. But the narratives themselves he remembered well because they were so closely intertwined with the life of the people of his own native community.

Medieval storytellers and poets in many countries were expected to be well-versed in the history, traditions and genealogy of their people. E.g., the Teutonic *scop*, the Hindu *sūta*, the Irish *fili,* and the Welsh *pencerdd* ('chief bard') (Holzknecht 1923, 21–22; Williams 1972, 15). In some countries, the same is true of post-medieval storytellers and poets. It is true, for example, of the Irish *seanchaí* (Delargy 1945) and, to a lesser extent, of the Welsh storyteller. In Wales, as elsewhere, the link between the present and the past was a very real one. Folk memory made people conscious of a long and vivid history, and Lewis Evans' repertoire reflects this awareness of the past – its saints and heroes and national events. He was also proud of his knowledge of the history and traditions of his own family and of the people of his own community and country. The traditions were alive in his mind because to him there was a purpose in re-living the past: it was a means of understanding the present and a source of inspiration for the future. And here we have another important key to our understanding of memory itself because inspiration plays a vital role in activating the memory.

**Memory and the Folk Narrative Repertoire of a Passive Tradition-Bearer**

What is the nature of the narration of a passive tradition-bearer? Is it a performance, or is it regarded primarily as a means of communication? (Ben-Amos 1971) How does it differ from the performing skills of an active storyteller? What "elaborate mnemonic processes" (Bruford 1981, 103) are used by a passive storyteller? How does loss of memory affect narration? (Vansina 1965; Tharp 1972; Luria 1975; Lauren 1981). In general, Lewis Evans would be described as a passive tradition-bearer. Care must be taken, however, not to over-simplify the active and passive role of a *homo tradens*. As von Sydow (1948), Goldstein (1972), and other scholars have stressed, certain items in a tradition-bearer's repertoire may be active, while at the same time, other items are inactive.

This is certainly true in the case of Lewis Evans. Although he was renowned not so much for the way he told a story, but for the great number of stories and traditions he knew, it is important to consider the form, structure and style of the narratives in relation to the various genres in his repertoire. When he recited the narratives which were alive

in his mind, in particular over 200 jokes and anecdotes relating to local characters and events, he retold them, in the words of an old chronicler: *iocunde et memoriter* ('with joy and from memory') (Wells 1950, 8).

During his younger days, he was active as a tradition-bearer because of the many opportunities he had to transmit that tradition in a relaxed and happy atmosphere. But Lewis Evans' working days came to an end. Most of his former working colleagues and neighbours had died, and as increasingly fewer opportunities arose to transmit the tradition, it became more and more inactive. Daniel L Schacter remarked: "…retrieving a memory is like reconstructing a dinosaur from fragments of bone" (Schacter 1996, 69–70). How did Lewis Evans remember his early tales? And why did he wish to remember them at all? One brief answer? Because he was conscious of their worth. They had become part of his own thoughts and values, and he re-lived them over the years in his own mind.

Very relevant to Lewis Evans' repertoire is Lauri Harvilahti's important article entitled "Variation and Memory" in which he discusses two kinds of memory: "working memory" and "long-term memory" (Harvilahti 2000, 57; see also Chafe 1977, 222–24, and Tulving 1972). All storytellers, including Lewis Evans, make use of their memories in different ways to help them remember and recreate their tales. We could mention: conceptual or structural memory; verbal memory and visual memory (Postman and Keppel 1969; MacDonald 1978; 1981; Bruford 1981). Here we are also reminded of *Ars memoria* which was such an important aspect of medieval culture in Europe.

It seems that Lewis Evans was able to remember many of the tales relating to his native community because he could recreate in his own mind concrete pictures of the actual characters and events depicted in these tales. However, occasionally, he would be conscious that he himself could not recite a story to enable the listener to "visualize vividly each scene in a clear and chronological order." What therefore is the influence of faulty memory on the narration of an elderly passive tradition-bearer? What instances of faulty memory do we notice (Krohn 1971, 64–70)?

The four following points could be mentioned very briefly:

1. Process of generalisation.
2. Process of simplification.
3. Occasional examples of disjointed or fragmentary narration.
4. Ample use of what Bruce Rosenberg (1970, 9) calls "stalling formulas."

**Memory, Empathy and Rapport; Narration and Communication in Action**

To what extent is memory the result of a dual activity? What is the active role of the interviewer, listener or audience in re-activating a passive tradition-bearer's memory? Indeed, with certain narrative genres, can texts be fully remembered and re-told without also re-creating the context?

Lewis Evans would not describe himself as a storyteller or even a tradition-bearer. He was, rather, a communicator who was fond of stories and anecdotes and would make use of them in his everyday communication. With the exception of some of the early

rather 'special' tales he had heard from his father and blind uncle, the majority of the narratives would have been related to him unconsciously and informally as part of everyday conversation. To understand the narratives we must also understand something about what the anthropologist Dell Hymes calls "the ethnography of speaking" or "the ethnography of communication" (Hymes 1962; 1974; Gumperz and Hymes 1964; Bauman and Sherzer 1974). For Lewis Evans, narration was not the end product. First and foremost it was a means of communication (Ben-Amos 1971; Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975). The only way, therefore, to bring back to memory the majority of the 350 narratives was by asking him to recreate the life of the people in his own community.

To what extent does an interviewer's personality and character influence, however unconsciously, the nature of an informant's narration? I would like to think that Lewis Evans regarded me as a very good friend rather than a young researcher. Certainly, after ten years in his company, I began to learn something of the importance of gaining a narrator's complete trust and confidence and of the active role of the interviewer – the great challenge of *procio'r cof* ('stimulating the memory'). Most important of all, perhaps, the art of active listening and understanding, empathy and rapport.

Although Lewis Evans was 82 years of age when I had the great privilege of meeting him for the first time, whenever I was in his company the same old spark would return to his eyes. His niece told me that the last ten years were the happiest of his life (cf. Pentikäinen 1978, 76). On leaving him, one of his parting remarks would usually be: "Come and see me again soon." By re-living the past, therefore, and having someone to listen to him with sympathy and understanding and share with him the process of recreating that past, the narrator was, as it were, given a new lease of life. The quiet, reserved, passive man would, for a while, become verbal and active once more.

In this article, six issues were considered which, I suggest, are important in our understanding of memory and narration. In conclusion, it must be emphasised that we cannot and should not study memory in a vacuum, but as memory in action. Just as we cannot understand texts without studying context, we cannot truly understand context without knowing something about the narrator's personality, his life history and worldview, and the life of the people of his community. We begin and end with the narrator, the communicator – the individual as a human being (Georges and Jones 1980). Then we will be in a position to at least begin to know something also about this wonderful gift we call memory, "the invisible 'black box' of our innermost mind" (Hoppál 1980, 293), and know how it influences narration and the range and nature of a narrator's repertoire. Furthermore, we as scholars will begin to learn something of the importance of humility. We will learn, for example, that although over 350 items of narrative were identified in Lewis Evans' repertoire, actual numbers and items mean very little – that was not the sum total of his culture.

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# TIME SPIRALS IN SLOVENIAN SHORT FOLKLORE FORMS

Saša Babič*

Time is one of anthropology's universals: all societies have focused their attention on time. Aspects of time can be gleaned from language, especially from folklore, where everyday and mythological time are intertwined. A look at the concepts of time in folklore, even the smallest genres (proverbs, riddles, etc.) reveals complex aspects that tell us about timelessness and transience.

By (re)constructing time, man orients his being in the world: he determines his course of action, and he orients himself according to what has passed and what is to come. He divides time into the one after the beginning, the one in between and the one at the end; he cuts it into smaller manageable time units according to natural (day, night) and socially created (month) divisions, into the time of production and memory (Foucault 1991, 103–9). In this way, he is able to control life, since the divisions provide him with structure, continuity and functionality. He rethinks his being and inscribes it into the social system each time through these divisions.

Nowadays, in Western society, time is seen primarily from an everyday, practical point of view as a linear course of events, as a line that begins somewhere in the distant past and runs linearly towards its end. "To have personal and collective pasts and personal and collective futures means that we are human, that we live, both in the present and in the future" (Volarič 2010, 16). This conceptual temporal linearity seems to be a contemporary overlay of a deeper, longer-lasting understanding of the cyclicality of time that can be traced in various folklore genres.

Every talking of time is linked to society and culture (Šmitek and Brumen 2001, 8–9), as temporalities determine the temporal structures of everyday life (Volarič 2010, 17), even as the movement of the Earth and its moon around the sun determines the basis of biological and natural rhythms. Time has to be situated in a local, social and cultural

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environment (Šmitek and Brumen 2001, 7, 9). In all cultures, however, there seems to be an interplay of two perceptions of time: the everyday, practical, and the ideological, tied to rituals. Maurice Bloch explains practical time as derived from cognitive perception and for him linear; while ideological time exists in a ritual context and is created in order to conceal reality. Ideological time is static or cyclical, although ideas of cyclicality are not only enclosed in the context of ritual (after de Garzia 1964, 84, 90) but are also detectable in the concept of cyclicality in practical time.

Everyday or practical time is measured by calendar periodisation, which has been redefined several times in history, always according to specific social activities (Volarič 2010, 21). Calendars, by dividing time into days, weeks, months, and naming days after saints, not only show the linear passage of everyday, practical time but also divide our time into shorter or longer cycles that end and are then followed by new cycles (day, week, month, year…). This division is formed into the cyclical nature of so-called practical time. Namely, the marking of beginnings and endings is primarily concerned with the world order and thus with time and space as basic anthropological constants; from a ritual point of view, the eschatological myths already suggest that the end (of all existence) is inevitable (Šmitek 2001, 37), and this is also symbolically reflected in the beginnings and endings of periods of time (Šmitek 2001, 37). Man's closeness to the cosmic context of nature is expressed in our society in the rituals of the annual and life cycles (although in many it has lost its meaning). This experience has been imprinted in various genres and types of folklore, especially in myths and fairy tales, but also in stories, proverbs, riddles, folkloric prayers, intercessions, etc. (Šmitek 2001, 33).

Everyday, practical time is roughly divided into past, present and future. While the present and the future can be monitored and measured with our senses, or lived, the past is bound only to memory (Volarič 2010, 19); this memory often acquires different temporal perceptions over time, which is why we can use the clock and the calendar as external 'objective' measures, and only the changing of day and night as natural ones. The described representations of time are very much present in the language, where we can observe the conceptualisations. The division of past, present and future, the linkage of linear and cyclical time, and the understanding of the interrelation of a (human) being and time can be traced from folklore texts (see also Mencej 2001).

The paper deals with the representation of time in the Slovenian language (as one of the representers of the Slavic language group), more specifically the past, present and future in folklore forms, taking into account mainly proverbs, riddles, folklore prayers and charms, and analyses them with the help of a semiotic approach and the perception of conceptual metaphors.

**Short Folklore Forms as Signs and Concepts**

Short folklore forms are a diverse group of usually short folklore texts, which interact with each other and vary considerably in length: they may consist of a single word (e.g. a greeting), a single sentence (proverbs, riddles), or a smaller, condensed text with more sentences (a speech, a prayer). The structure, function, texture and context of use are

very different (Babič 2015, 10). One of the specific features of folklore forms is their origin: They are not only related to the language but also to cultural contacts between language areas, the influence of the dominant. The origin of a short folklore form is also determined by its use: it may have come from a foreign linguistic environment (in Slovene, most often from Latin or German), but speakers have incorporated it into their linguistic and cultural code, adding to it the features of their own language and cultural environment, and transforming it over time according to their habitat and mentality. This is where folklore, with all its spatial and linguistic determinants, comes in.

Short folklore forms are relatively settled forms that preserve words and meanings, from the cognitive point of view, short folklore forms are "even linguistically and culturally coined frames" (Lewandowska and Antos 2014, 162), based on "socially efficient cognitive concepts" (Lewandowska and Antos 2014, 167). They could be also observed as so-called conceptual metaphors that are established in the language. Conceptual metaphors are part of everyday language; they are metaphors used to express initial domains that are more difficult to describe, with other domains such as THEORY IS BUILDING or TIME IS MONEY, etc. (Lakoff and Johnson 2003); it is about the human ability to see one (target) conceptual domain in the context of another (initial) one, where the mapping is unidirectional, namely from a more precisely delimited domain to a less precisely delimited one (Lewandowska and Antos 2014, 163). As such, these units constitute the so-called semiotic sign, they are "signs of situations or of a certain kind of relations between objects" (Permyakov 1979, 20). The figurative meaning of a so-called "clichéd text," such as a proverb, allows folklore texts to be used also as rules for identifying new and previously unknown situations (Permyakov 1979, 272), and in the matter of our research, create the conceptual cyclicity. The short folklore forms are considered the "complex supersigns" (Grzybek 2014, 85) from which we can discern a worldview and attitudes (*knowledge* and *evaluation*; Drewer 2003, 10) towards basic social levels and relationships.

**How Do We Talk About Time?**

Time is a natural experience and an experience of nature, about which we express ourselves almost exclusively metaphorically, with conceptual metaphors. Together with space, it is an anthropological constant, but space is more concrete and easier to imagine, so it is not surprising that we express time spatially, as is (also) shown by the use of the propositions in (*we will finish work in an hour; we will travel in the future*), at (*we will see you at five*), etc. The above shows that time is metaphorically conceptualised in terms of space, but space is only the basis for the metonymic relationship between time and space (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 266). A more obvious conceptual link is seen in expressions that conceptualise time as a static phenomenon through which we move, e.g., "time" (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 266). To express this, the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A STATIC OBJECT THROUGH WHICH WE MOVE, containing certain milestones, has been established. Time is also spoken of as a moving phenomenon, e.g. time flows, glides by, creeps, forming the conceptual metaphor TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT, where

contextualisation highlights the fast or slow passage of time. Time has also been conceptually linked by highlighting its value in the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, e.g. to waste time, to save time, to invest a lot of time in, etc. This conceptual metaphor highlights time as a precious commodity, as it is a finite resource in which to achieve our goals, and finite resources are increasingly precious. The value of time as a commodity, a power, an irreversibility, has only become more evident in Slovenian folklore forms, especially proverbs, since the nineteenth century (Orel 2016, 207). In any case, the conceptual value of time in the Western world begins to manifest itself with the age of industrialisation and the structuring of our everyday lives – people are paid according to the hours they work. The link between money and time became strongly established in language, as is evident in the phrases *annual salary, monthly rent, daily wage*, etc. (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 8; Lewandowska and Antos 2014, 165). The structure of our time is also closely linked to the money we earn and spend: it determines our daily rhythm. All of the above explains the close relationship between money and time and explains the value category of time. The conceptual metaphor TIME IS A SUBSTANCE highlights above all the quality of time, e.g. hard times, etc. Within this conceptual metaphor, the close proximity to the conceptual world of work, which forms similar conceptual metaphors to time, is also related, as it is also assigned a value in relation to the unit, striving for purposefulness and progressiveness, e.g. hard work, easy work (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, 147). The conceptual metaphor of time is also related to the conceptual world of work.

## Methodology

For the purposes of the research, online databases of proverb (Babič et al. 2022) and riddle (Babič 2018) collections were consulted and the target units were searched using the keywords: time, past, present, future. For the analysis of ritual folklore forms, the book collections of charms *Zagovori* [Charms] (Dolenc 1999) and folk prayers *Slovenske ljudske molitve* [Slovenian Folk Prayers] (Novak 1983) were consulted. While in the case of the first two genres, i.e. proverbs and riddles, a keyword search was sufficient, in the case of charms and prayers a more detailed reading and contextual interpretation of time terms was necessary.

For the analysis, the discursive analysis was employed, with a focus on the description or the naming of the time, past, present moment, and future. With the conceptual metaphor analysis and theory (and minor help of semiotics), the time conceptual map on the three main divisions of time was set.

## Analysis of Folklore Forms

### *Proverbs*

Proverbs are folklore forms characterised by rhyme, metaphoricity and conciseness of message by definition (Matičetov 1956; Stanonik 2001; Babič 2015); they carry the

authority in society of the wisdom of our ancestors (Mieder 2004), several of those generations who, through observation and experience, attempted to order the world and systematise it in pre-prepared statements. This is why proverbs are seen as a convenient rhetorical device that conveys social rules and values in a more elegant way.

*Time*

In proverbs, temporality is often expressed by metonymic expressions such as time units (hour, day, month …), or it is indicated metaphorically by naming people/animals according to age category (child, young man, grandfather, daughter-mother …) and life stages (youth, old age …), by the state and cessation of the state of a living being (life-death …), etc. (Orel 2016, 203), e.g. *Ne hvali dneva pred večerom* ('Don't boast of the day before the evening') and *Ne hvali se z jutrišnjim dnem* ('Don't boast of tomorrow'), where the future is marked by the metonymic 'tomorrow.'

All the conceptual metaphors already mentioned are expressed in the material, and to the existing ones we can add TIME IS A LIVING BEING, TIME IS A DREAM, TIME IS AN OBJECT, TIME IS A TOOL and even TIME IS A FIELD:

1. TIME IS A STATIC OBJECT:

*Vse ima svoj čas* ('Everything has its time')
*Delaj in moli, vsako ob svojem času* ('Work and pray, each in its own time')

2. TIME IS A MOVING OBJECT:

*Preteklost se nikdar več ne vrne* ('The past never comes back')
*Čas vse v kozji rog užene* ('Time drives everything into a goat's horn')
*Čas teče, pa nič ne reče* ('Time runs, but says nothing')

3. TIME IS MONEY or TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY:

*Kdor z igračo svoj čas trati, prazno slamo mlati*
('He who wastes his time with a toy is grinding empty straw')
*Vse je naprodaj, le čas ne* ('Everything is for sale but time')
*Unča časa je unča zlata* ('An ounce of time is an ounce of gold')
*Če ljubiš življenje, ne zapravljaj časa* ('If you love life, don't waste time')
*Lenuh je tat, ki bogu krade čas, ljudem pa denar*
('A sluggard is a thief who steals time from God and money from people')

4. TIME IS A SUBSTANCE:

*Mladi čas, zlati čas* ('Young time, golden time')
*Čas je najzanesljivejši strup* ('Time is the surest poison')
*Čas je zlato/najdražji biser* ('Time is gold/the most precious pearl')

5. TIME IS A THING:

*Kolo časa ni mogoče pognati nazaj, še manj ustaviti*
('The wheel of time cannot be turned back, much less stopped')

*Kdor hoče brati v prihodnost, mora listati po preteklosti*
('Whoever wants to read into the future must leaf through the past')

6. TIME IS A TOOL:
*S časom tudi voda razje kamen* ('With time, even water corrodes the stone')
*S časom se še čas obrne* ('With time, even time turns')

7. TIME IS A LIVING BEING:
*Kdor čas ceni, njega i čas* ('He who values time, time also values him')
*Čas vendar polagoma zaceli rane/zdravi* ('Time, however, slowly heals wounds/heals')
*Čas napravi svoje* ('Time does its own thing')
*Čas ima močne zobe* ('Time has strong teeth')

8. TIME IS A FIELD:
*Vsaki čas ima svoje cvetke* ('Every time has its flowers')

When examining the material of paremiological units according to the most basic temporal coordinates of past, present, future and moment, similar conceptual metaphors emerge as those found in paremiological units with the time component, but they differ according to the time period.

*The Future*

The future is considered to be a time that has not yet happened, about which we know nothing and is therefore unpredictable, as is evident in the paremia *Prihodnost je v božjih rokah* ('The future is in God's hands'), which points to the view that what is inaccessible to us is still under the influence of a higher power, which we cannot control.

Proverbs containing the future sign form the following conceptual metaphors:
1. THE FUTURE IS SPACE:
*Marsikatera pot v prihodnost je tlakovana z žolčnimi kamni*
('Many a road to the future is paved with gallstones')

2. THE FUTURE IS THREATENING:
*Revež je tisti, ki se boji prihodnosti*
('A poor man is one who fears the future')

3. THE FUTURE IS A PLANT:
*Vsi cvetovi prihodnosti so v semenu sedanjosti*
('All the flowers of the future are in the seed of the present')

4. THE FUTURE IS AN OBJECT:
*Kdor hoče brati v prihodnost, mora listati po preteklosti*
('He who would read into the future must leaf through the past')

The saying *Kdor ne misli na prihodnost, ne bo imel prihodnosti* ('He who does not think about the future will not have a future') functions, above all, as a threat: Time is understood primarily as something that can potentially be possessed, with particular emphasis on the future. One cannot have a good future if s/he does not think of it already in the present; from this point of view, the future is considered a phenomenon with value or as goods.

*The Present and the Moment*

The present – like the moment – seems to be unstoppable, creating the conceptual metaphor PRESENT/MOMENT IS A MOVING OBJECT: *Prihodnost nas vznemirja, preteklost zadržuje, zato nam sedanjost uhaja* ('The future excites us, the past holds us back, so the present eludes us'); *Kdor le predolgo čaka, ta zamudi pravi trenutek* ('Whoever waits too long misses the moment'). The moment is often thought of as a part of the present in time, or even the present is a moment in time, because every moment that passes is no longer the present, but only the past and the expected moment is the future. That is why we can conceptually link the present and the moment at this point.

Both the present and the moment are associated with the concept of the commodity, although the paremiological units formulate the opposite: *Sedanjost ni nikoli zlata doba* ('The present is never a golden age'); *Vsak trenutek v življenju več velja kot cela gora zlata* ('Every moment in life is worth more than a whole mountain of gold'). If the first example emphasises that life seems difficult in the present (while a glance at the past or even the future might change this perspective), the second unit is linked to the importance of the pricelessness of life, which is also emphasised in the proverb *Trenutek časa je trenutek milosti* ('A moment of time is a moment of grace').

*The Past*

The units of proverbs containing the past are the smallest in the material. A conceptual metaphor related to the cultivation of crops, i.e. the field, is repeated:

THE PAST IS THE FIELD: *Iz preteklosti raste danes* ('From the past grows today').

Moreover, the PAST IS A MOVING OBJECT: *Preteklost se nič več ne vrne* ('Nothing returns to the past'); *Kar je preteklost – je odšlo, kar pričakuješ – tega še ni, samo sedanjost je Tvoja* ('What is past – is gone, what you expect – is not yet, only the present is yours').

However, the conceptual metaphor THE PAST IS A STATIC OBJECT, through which we have travelled, is not to be found in the material, which is surprising in view of the impossibility of changing it. Staticity is replaced by the conceptual metaphor THE PAST IS THE OBJECT: *Preteklost je vedno mogoče uničiti, prihodnost pa je neizbežna* ('The past can

always be destroyed, but the future is inevitable'); *Kdor hoče brati v prihodnost, mora listati po preteklosti* ('Whoever wants to read into the future must leaf through the past').

The close connection between space and time is suggested by the conceptual metaphor THE PAST IS SPACE: *Zasluge v preteklosti ne opravičujejo napak v sedanjosti* ('Merit in the past does not justify mistakes in the present'), which places our actions in space-time.

The equation in time in the paremiological unit, which fuses time into a single mass that only becomes less visible: *Preteklost ni nič drugega kakor sedanjost, ki je postala nevidna in nema* ('the past is nothing but the present, which has become invisible and mute'), stands out in the material: but it is important to point out that the saying is found in only one source, namely a manuscript collection, and therefore this aspect can hardly be confirmed as relevant for this research.

*Weather Paremias*

Weather forecasts are also included among the paremiological units. In general, all weather forecasts could be classified in the discussion of time, since they allude to, predict, the time to come (e.g.: *Ako je prvega dne v adventu mraz, trajal bo ves zimski čas* ['As it is cold on the first day of Advent, it will last throughout the winter']; *Na Jurija dan je pravi čas, da nam rž pokaže prvi klas* ['On St George's Day, it is the right time for the rye to show its first ear']; *V oktobru burja, mraz – januarja sončen čas* ['In October, storm, cold – in January, sunny weather']). Weather forecasts focus on the future, which seems so uncertain to a human – *nikoli se ne ve, kaj prihodnost prinese* ('one never knows what the future will bring forth'); it is not only the way to predict the future but a way to make an uncertain future manageable. Nature and the weather phenomena in a cyclical year can predict what will come next: what the weather will be like and what the harvest will be like. In this way, they were also able to predict prosperity or poverty. The word future thus appears in weather paremias in predictions of the month(s) and even the year that follows: *Veter na sveti dan obeta dosti sadja prihodnjega leta* ('The wind on a holy day promises much fruit next year').

*Riddles*

Riddles are relatively fixed linguistic structures with an image and an apparent contrast (Kaivola Bregenhøj 2001, 9). Aristotle points out that a riddle attempts to characterise a thing in an impossible word association, which can only be achieved through examples (Gantar 2005, 125). It is a genre that belongs to word games (Bausinger 1968, 119), as a riddle is composed of two parts. The first part is a metaphorical description or image - this can be in the form of an assertion or a question mark; it is a metaphorical and convoluted thought that the puzzler has to solve. The second part is the answer, which can be a word or phrase or a (one- or multi-sentence) explanation. The two-part structure of the riddles makes it necessary for two participants to be present when the riddles are presented: the poser of the riddle is the one who poses the riddle (telling the

metaphorical description or image), and the guesser is the one who has to solve the riddle (telling the answer) – this clearly shows the dialogical structure of the genre, and Vilko Novak notes the "dramaturgic" nature of riddles (1960, 243). The image and the answer are linked by similarity, relatedness, contradiction, and counter-meaning (Čubelić 1988, 364). Another characteristic feature is that the riddles hide and replace persons, animals, and things in pictures or metaphors; the posing of such riddles is the closest to hide-and-seek puzzles.

Time in riddles was researched mainly on the basis of those riddles where time was the answer. On the basis of this material, we can classify these puzzles into the following conceptual metaphors:

1. TIME IS A LIVING BEING:

*Kdo je najboljši zdravnik? – Čas* ('Who is the best doctor? – Time')
*Kdo teče brez nog? – Čas* ('Who runs without legs? – Time')
*Pride, pri nas je in zopet gre; noben cesar in noben kralj ga ni videl niti slišal. – Čas*
('He comes, he comes and he goes again; no emperor and no king has seen him or heard of him. – Time')

2. TIME IS A SUBSTANCE:

*Kdo je star in zmeraj mlad, enim predolg, drugim prekratek? – Čas*
('Who is old and always young, too long for some and too short for others? – Time')

3. TIME IS MONEY:

*Kaj ni naprodaj za noben denar na svetu? – Zgubljeni čas*
('What is not for sale for any money in the world? – Lost time')
*Kaj se ne da za ves svet kupiti? – Zgubljeni čas*
('What is not for all the world to buy? – Lost time')

Past, future and present do not appear as words in the analysed material, but are mostly expressed metonymically with smaller units of time or with verbs denoting past, future or present actions. The elusiveness of the present, perhaps even of the moment, is thus thematised by the riddle: *Nikoli ni bilo, nikoli ne bo, pa vendar je. – Današnji dan* ('It never was, it never will be, and yet it is – today').

*Charms and Prayers*

Ritual folklore forms include charms and folklore prayers (Babič 2015, 92). The two genres are similar and exist in oral or written form. Charms are rituals or texts that remedy an inconvenience or illness, so the intercessor does not turn to the deity, the personified illness, in a humble and contrite manner, but rather demands the illness to retreat, to be chased away. Charming is healing with magical powers, and charm is the textual part of this ritual (Dolenc 1999, 28; Vel'mezova 2004). Folk prayers have the function of protection in the form of a petition: a deity or a higher power is asked for protection. The text of the ritual has a magical power that affects man and nature (the

surrounding world), and its practical realisation is usually individual (Vel'mezova 2004, 17).

In these forms, the analysed terms were not traced and a more detailed reading and contextual interpretation were necessary. This revealed that in the charms, time is expressed metonymically with shorter time units: the present is indicated by the word *today*: *dan's je kačji dan od gada dan* ('today is the serpent's day from gada dan') (Dolenc 1999, 173), the future by *tomorrow*, *the day after tomorrow*, and in the folk prayers, the future (when the prayer is supposed to be protected) is *midnight*, *night*, *morning* (Novak 1983). This suggests the need for more concrete terms for time, those denoting natural units of time (day, night, morning, etc.), and more manageable time periods; namely, in ritual forms, the word has more power, so the meaning needs to be precisely defined in time – only in this way can the charm form function in earthly and social timelines.

**Instead of a Conclusion**

Proverbs and riddles are part of everyday life and therefore closer to practical time, while ritual folklore forms are closer to mythology and 'sacred time,' or the absence of temporality seems like an eternal presence, while at the same time, the time definitions are much more precise (*midnight, night, morning, today, tomorrow*, etc.). The 'past' is not to be found in Slovenian ritual forms, the biblical story merely repeats the sacred act, and thus the texts with the extended story (the so-called *historiola*) return us to mythological time. The 'future' is marked only by the temporal adverbs tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, where temporality is not emphasised, but the gradual progress of the withdrawal of the disease is expressed in this way. The time markers in the Slovenian charms and prayers are therefore related to natural divisions of time, not to social divisions, and are concrete in relation to natural time cycles. Abstract notions such as future, present and past are the signs absent from this material. In the case of Slovenian ritual folklore forms, there is a return to mythological time, which abolishes time as a category of being (only the category of space is emphasised in the texts), they take place here and now, in 'non-time.' The relative greatest integrity of mythic consciousness is visible in the fact that it combines the unity of word, object and action (Ošlaj 2001, 81).

In Slovenian proverbs and riddles, the conceptual aspect of temporality: time itself, the past, the present and the future, is more evident. It is evident that time itself represents value/limited resource/valuable commodity (see also Lewandowska and Antos 2014, 165), that which material value (i.e. money) cannot yet replace. We think of time as a static entity waiting for us, as a moving object that keeps up with us or escapes us, as a space, a substance, an object, a threat, a living being, a field or even a plant. All categories have in common connections with the field and plants, with money and with the book, and it is worth pointing out that these are three categories that, diachronically speaking, expressed high value in Slovenian cultural view. All the conceptual metaphors mentioned in the analysis clearly show that time is interwoven in all pores

of our being and that we express ourselves about it, so to speak, with conceptual metaphors from all layers of our lives.

If Slovenian proverbs and riddles are considered semiotic units, they show us the transience of time and thus its high value, our inability to change the past, our ability to influence the future, and thus become an incentive for activity and our control (only) over the present - the here and now. In the case of individual units, it even seems that it is only time that influences us and our lives, and we are like wet clay, moulding ourselves according to the demands of time. As a super-sign, weather paroemias function as signs for predicting the future.

Perceptions of time often have a function of time measurement and are socially determined (Evans-Pritchard 1993, 209). The measurement of time is therefore objectively given, but the perception of time is more personal and often tied to cyclicality rather than linearity, as time is also measured in rituals with annual and life cycles, with the past seeming to have more value than the future because it is more manageable (Šmitek 2001, 37), yet the future carries the greatest potential for change for the better. The experience of cyclicality is embedded in expressions of various types and in oral traditions, not only in myths and riddles but also in proverbs and riddles (Šmitek 2001, 33). However, a human being is not only a mythical being, s/he is also a practical, experiential, social being who experiences irreversible time. The mythical world is, therefore, a dual world in its formal structuring, but one that constantly strives to prove the opposite in thought and action: the integrity or contradiction of the two inherently irreconcilable dimensions of time (Ošlaj 2001, 80), which can be well seen also in a proverb *The wheel of time cannot be turned back, much less stopped*, where the cyclicity is expressed in a 'wheel' metaphor, linearity, on-going is expressed as 'cannot be turned back.' Ošlaj emphasises that man is mythical to the extent that he suppresses the irreversible, renewing integrity of the unsplit coexistence between humans and the world of things (Ošlaj 2001, 80), which is evident in the paremiological unit *Čez 7 let vse prav pride* ('In 7 years everything comes in handy'). All three dimensions of diachronic time – past, present and future – seem to be synchronised by mythic consciousness into an unmoving presentness that offers man an adequate patch (Ošlaj 2001, 83) to the inevitable linearity towards the end of lived and thus (subjective) time, which is also narrated by short folklore forms.

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# BETWEEN MYTHOLOGY AND HISTORY: ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF PAGAN PRINCESSES

Joep Leerssen*

**Introduction: How Legends, Ousted from History-Writing, Found Sanctuary in Historical Fiction**

Whatever mythology is (and the definition is anything but straightforward; Leerssen 2016; 2021a), it is distinct from 'history' as we understand that term nowadays. Historians study the past as a series of factual events documented in reliable sources, and their endeavour is predicated on the exclusion of fantasy, speculation and myth. That factualism has become a hallmark of the historical sciences over the last two centuries, driven by academic professionalisation and an archival turn.

That distinction – and even opposition – between history and myth emerges in the course of the eighteenth century. Historians became increasingly reluctant to rely on source traditions that lacked archival documentation and grew sceptical of narratives of ancient vintage containing supernatural elements. Mid-seventeenth-century Irish antiquarians like Geoffrey Keating took medieval legends as to the origins of the Gaels at face value (Cunningham 2000); it was a sign of the changing times that, when his works reached an English-language reading public in the early eighteenth century, they were derided as credulous and fantastical (and, as such, 'typically Irish').

Not only in Ireland but all over Europe, medieval and early-modern legendary or mythical accounts of the past lost credence among historians by 1800. The treatment of Odin as a historical character by Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri is a case in point; so are the ancestral tales of the Czech patriarch Krok (in the *Chronica Boemorum* by Cosmas of Prague), or of his Polish analogue Krak (in the *Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae* by Wincenty Kadłubek). Both had been recycled by many medieval and early-modern followers and continuators, like the more familiar British tales about Arthur, or about Hengist and Horsa, from Gildas and Nennius to William of Malmesbury. By 1830,

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they were excluded from History and instead, as legends, moved closer to the genres of saga and myth, as these narrative genres were being re-categorised under the influence of Jacob Grimm (cf. Gunnell 2022).

What I want to outline in the following pages is how the factualisation of history, and its demythologisation, ran concurrently with a new, Romantic interest in the legends now spurned by historians, and how these legends became Romantic, inspiring wonder tales about the early formative moments in the nation's history. In doing so, I take my inspiration from Terry Gunnell, who has shown how sagas and wonder tales link the history of literature, of oral-popular culture, and of knowledge production, and who has addressed this nexus in an exemplary transnational way (Gunnell 2008). I also gratefully avail myself of the information put together by the many contributors (Gunnell amongst them) to the *Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe* (ERNiE 2018).

## On the Cusp of Documented History: Christianisation and the Nation's Emergence into Literacy

Accounts of national history, when looking into the past, ran into an event horizon at the further end of reliable archival documentation. A distant shadow zone was provided at best by classical authors reporting on northern societies (Tacitus, Caesar, Pliny, Strabo). For those societies that developed a self-chronicling literacy after the introduction of Christianity, that very changeover provides a demarcation between recorded history (literate, Christian) and remembered mythology (orally transmitted, pagan). But the changeover itself is dealt with, typically, in legendary terms. Indeed the word 'legend' is very much to the point here, because it is used specifically for the lives and deeds of Christian saints; and their sainthood is habitually demonstrated by miracles performed by them or around their relics (the expulsion of snakes from Ireland by St Patrick, the post-mortem mobility of St Denis and St James).

In the romantic decades, when the old, all-encompassing, uncritical and often amateur-driven tradition of antiquarianism fissioned into successor fields like the Romantic novel, archaeology, academically institutionalised history and folklore studies, we encounter a fresh interest in that shadowy event horizon where documented historical facts shade into miraculous and heroic legends. Tales of Christianisation take up an important position here. Many Romantic historical novels deal, in fact, with the early martyrs in Imperial Rome. We know the genre from its Hollywood reworkings: *Quo Vadis* (1951, based on Henryk Sienkiewicz's 1895 novel) and *Ben Hur* (1959, based on Lew Wallace's 1880 novel). For those who study the romantic historical novel as, par excellence, a national and nation-building genre – witness the many case studies in Pittock 2007 –, it comes as a surprise to see how many specimens deal with the transnational theme of early Christianity. Walter Scott himself never took the genre in that direction, but his younger contemporaries Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Nicholas Wiseman did, with, respectively, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) and *Fabiola* (1854, written as a response to Charles Kingsley's anti-papist *Hypatia*, 1853). Those novels drew on, and in a manner perpetuated, a Christian-martyrological tradition with deep

historical roots far antedating romanticism: Eugène Scribe's libretto for Gaetano Donizetti's opera *Les Martyrs* (1840) was a reworking of Corneille's play *Poleyeucte* (1641–42) which in turn draws on the hagiographical texts concerning the early-Christan martyr of that name. The Romantic reinvigoration of Christian martyrology owes much to Chateaubriand's *Les Martyrs* (1809), a prose epic on a Roman legionary stationed in Brittany who, after a tragic love affair with the Gaulish priestess Velléda, converts to Christianity and eventually suffers martyrdom.

Such tales belong to a very peculiar niche in the ontological shadow zone between fact and fiction, history and myth. Martyrologies and *Acta Martyrum* date back to the mid-fourth century, and the persecutions and martyrdoms of individuals identified in those old sources (like Polyeuctes) were commemorated as actual events in the Christian liturgy – their *vitae* adumbrated, to be sure, by supernatural and miraculous elements. However, the protagonists of Chateaubriand, Bulwer-Lytton, and Wiseman were pure fiction, more like *Ivanhoe* than like Polyeuctes. (Wiseman's fictional Fabiola shared only the name with the fourth-century saint who is on record as a medical philanthropist and correspondent of Augustine).

**Legends into (Historical) Fiction: Prešeren and Navarro Valloslada**

As with most historical novels, then, the tales choose a 'historical' (i.e. independently documented) setting in order to tell a story about fictional characters – much like Scott, in *Ivanhoe*, evokes Norman-conquered Saxon England during the Crusades in order to provide a background to the fictitious tale of Wilfred of Ivanhoe and Rebecca the Jewess. The historical background was rendered exciting and appealing by the narrative storylines, and made them vividly imaginable as a time of crisis and transition. The transition towards Christianity offers, transnationally, such an appealing setting, with the main spotlight obviously focused on the Christian persecutions as the last-ditch resistance of Roman paganism against the new dispensation. A different take on that historical juncture was given in Alexandre Soumet's play *Norma* and its spin-off, Bellini's opera of the same name and year (1831). As in Chateaubriand's *Les martyrs*, the central action is sparked off by the love between a Roman soldier and a Gaulish priestess, but there is no Christianity on the horizon in this case.

Bellini's *Norma* suggests, rather, that stories of how pagan societies faced the advent of Christianity (and thereby also their entrance into recorded history) could evoke conflicting audience sympathies. The nation's deep mythological roots and pre-Christian religion are evoked reverently, but nonetheless, the advent of Christianity is universally seen as a triumph of civilised values (morality, virtue) over benighted and cruel superstition. That same moral ambiguity suffuses France Prešeren's epic poem *Krst pri Savici* [The Baptism on the Savica River] (1835; Prešeren 1996; Juvan 2014). This lyrical-narrative poem, which enjoys the status of the Slovenian national epic, describes the defeat of the last pagan chieftain of the Slovenian Slavs, Črtomir. In the aftermath of the defeat, a disconsolate Črtomir encounters his beloved Bogomila, who had been a priestess of the goddess Živa but who has now converted. (The two figures are wholly

fictional, invented by Prešeren as Scott invented Ivanhoe.) Bogomila prevails upon Črtomir that he, too, should embrace Christianity; he is baptised, the two dedicate their lives to their new religion and they can look forward only to a reunion in the hereafter. Is Črtomir's baptism a self-abnegating act of wisdom, ensuring the continuing existence of the Slovenes into a new dispensation; or is it the final nadir of his defeat?

Regret at the passing of primitive paganism would become more prevalent in the course of the next century. Witness the powerful legend involving the Frisian King Redbad, the last pagan leader of his tribe (Nijdam and Knottnerus 2019). According to legend, he refused baptism (even while standing with one foot in the baptismal font) if it meant that he would be separated from his forebears in the hereafter. The medieval source text deplores Redbad's stubbornness, but by the time of the Frisian-language play *Redbad* (1951) by the fascist sympathiser Douwe Kalma, it is a sign of stalwart intransigence: Christianity is part of the foreign-imposed hegemony that true patriots are meant to reject. The scene was reprised in the ethnopopulist action movie *Redbad* (2018). German nativist nationalists extended a similar neopaganist, anti-Christian sympathy to the Saxon leader Widukind in the 1930s, rejecting his victorious enemy Charlemagne as a tool in the expansionist power of papal Rome. Similarly, sympathy grew in Finland for the legendary Lalli, said to have slain the Swedish missionary bishop Henrik, following Eino Leino's play *Lalli* (1907).

Closer to Prešeren's ironic even-handedness is the Spanish-language novel *Amaya o los vascos en el siglo VIII* by Francisco Navarro Villoslada (1879). It presents national unity as something that transcends the rivalry between paganism and Christianity (Yoeli-Rimmer 2018). It describes how pagan and Christian Basques unite to aid the legendary resistance by Pelayo, King of Asturia, against the encroaching Muslims. The title heroine is among the first Basque princesses to have foresworn the cult of the patriarch-god Aitor (of whom she is said to have descended) and to have converted to Christianity – which will, as the book implies, ensure the continuance of Basque identity. Amaya is thus functionally an analogue of Bogomila in Prešeren's "Baptism on the Savica;" and as a literary figure she is rooted, not in medieval legend, but in national mythology.

In fact, the case of Basque mythology is curious. The figure of Aitor as the nation's creator / paternal deity does not come down from sources documenting pre-Christian pagan beliefs; nor is it extrapolated from later folkloristic vestiges, as elsewhere in Europe. Aitor was in fact a fictional character recently created, but who had begun to lead a life of his own as a 'fake cultural memory.' The French-Basque Augustin Chaho (1811–1858) had dreamed him up as the protagonist of a romantic wonder-tale, an allegorical figure whose seven sons represented the seven Basque provinces. Among readers south of the French-Spanish border, these fictional-allegorical origins were forgotten, as was Chaho's authorship, and Aitor became the name that people recall being given to the mythical creator of the Basque race (Juaristi 1987; Zabaltza Pérez-Nievas 2011). Thus historical fiction spawns mythology which in turn is relied upon to provide an ancient-cultural backdrop for later historical fiction.

Amaya and Bogomila are young women combining the secular/tribal status of princess and the pagan-religious status of priestess, and they are placed in a

transnational crisis where their nation, as it emerges from legendary prehistory, must embrace Christianity and the princess-priestesses give up their traditional status. That self-abnegating sacrifice is represented romantically as an instance of feminine virtue and also a way of ensuring the nation's secular continuance in the new, Christian dispensation.

**Last Princess: Holland, Poland, Bohemia, Lithuania**

Figures in this mode turn out to be quite prevalent in romantic nationalism. Fiona Stafford in her classic study *The Last of the Race* (Stafford 1994) has drawn attention to the prevalence of the trope of 'lastness' as a marker of the losses that are entailed by historical progress. Romantic titles return to the trope (supercharged by the impact of Ossian) again and again: from Scott's "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" to Bulwer-Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii,* from Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* to Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). This brings into focus a whole cohort of literary characters embodying The Nation's Last Pagan.

Analogues to Bogomila and Amaya are encountered in Dutch and Polish-Lithuanian literature as well. The 1832 Dutch historical novel *Hermingard van de Eikenterpen* [Hermingard of the Oak Knolls] by Aernout Drost thematises, Chateaubriand-style, the early dawn of Christianity in Holland; but unlike *Les martyrs*, the Dutch author evinces a Calvinist dislike of the Imperial-Papal auspices of Roman Christianity and hints instead at the incipience of a pure, proto-Protestant Christian morality, doomed for the nonce to be submerged in the Great Migration and Papal Christianity (Drost 1991, and the ed.'s afterword, 258–68). Hermingard, daughter of a tribal leader of the Batavi, is the heroine who stands at these historical crossroads. She converts and prevails upon her betrothed Siegbert to do likewise; which leads to Siegbert's saintly death at the hand of a wrathful pagan at the wedding altar, and her demise of a broken heart.

As we move eastwards across the map of Europe, the Last Princesses are dated to later centuries but are derived from more ancient sources than Drosts's historical novel. In Poland, the princess Wanda is linked to the eighth century (Degen and Dzikowska 2015). She was, reputedly, the daughter of Krak, the legendary founder of the city of Kraków. The tale of Krak and his daughter Wanda was written down by the Bishop of Kraków, Wincenty Kadłubek, in his *Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae* (c. 1200). It also contained the affecting legend of the princess Wanda, Krak's daughter, who refused to marry, and heroically resisted the political and sexual advances of a German tribal chief. Later versions have her commit a defiant suicide; the place where she was reputedly buried, *Kopiec Wandy* or Wanda's Hill, became a well-known landmark. Her Romantic cult is evinced by C.K. Norwid's epic poem *Wanda,* inspired by a visit to the hill (1851), by Maksymilian Piotrowski's painting "Wanda's Death" (1859) and by Matija Ban's Serbian dramatic poem *Vanda Kraljica Leška* [Wanda, the Polish Queen (1868)]. In 1876, Antonin Dvořák, a composer with pan-Slavic sympathies, wrote an opera on her; it was based on the earliest literary treatment, the German play (1809) by Zacharias Werner.

A Slavic opera on a German adaptation of a Slavic legend: in those respects, the romantic reception of Wanda mirrors that of her Czech counterpart Libuše, daughter of the eighth-century Czech duke Krok, who reputedly established his castle on Vyšehrad overlooking what later would become Prague. That city appeared to Libuše in a vision prophesying a great future. First mentioned in the *Chronica Boemorum* by Cosmas of Prague (c. 1120), the legend was popular and topographically anchored to the imposing Vyšehrad promontory (later to become the site of a Czech national cemetery/pantheon). The German Romantic poet Clemens Brentano based his *Die Gründung Prags* [The Foundation of Prague (1812)] on the legend, which was soon reappropriated by the Czech romantics and culminated in the Czech national opera par excellence, Smetana's *Libuše* (1872). It should be noted that Libuše was celebrated as a nationally foundational figure. If she marks a 'last of the race' function at all, this is linked to her intriguing position in the Czech legendary transition from a female- to a male-dominated society (Höhne 2013).

Wanda and Libuše, the two Slavic princesses, are both dated to a legendary ninth century, four centuries after the Batavian/Dutch Hermingard; a princess marking the conversion of the Baltic tribes to Christianity is much later again. As we can gather from the Lithuanian section of ERNiE 2018, the Lithuanian legend of Birutė is placed in the fourteenth century. She is mentioned as a priestess serving a fire sacred to the gods but given in marriage to Kęstutis, grand duke of the emerging Lithuanian polity, and as the mother of the Lithuanian state-builder Vytautas the Great. After her death, c. 1382–89, her memory was held in popular reverence, in particular at the landmark of Birutė Hill near Palanga; there are conflicting reports whether she had been killed by the Teutonic Order or had reverted to her hermit life as a pagan priestess. The priest Silvestras Teofilis Valiūnas (1789–1831) published his lastingly popular ballad *Birutė* in 1828; it was soon set to music (various Polish airs were used for the purpose) and gained widespread popularity. How canonical the figure became can be gauged from the name chosen by a cultural, language-revivalist organisation founded in Tilsit in 1885. *Birutė* was also the theme and title of the first Lithuanian opera (1906) by Mikas Petrauskas (Fig. 1). By that time, a type of national-traditional dress with laced bodice, popular with nationally-minded women and as the female performance dress of choral societies, was known as the *Birutė* style. Birutė Hill became a popular landmark and a neogothic 'Birutė's Chapel' was built there in 1869; six more monuments followed between 1931 and 2012.

Romantic nationalism evinced, generally, a fascination for princess protagonists; we see this, not only in some of the more popular fairy-tales of the century (also the literary ones like those of H. C. Andersen); we see it also in the popular-cultural impact of nineteenth-century female monarchs like Queen Louise of Prussia, Queen Victoria (at least in her younger, pre-widowed years) of the UK, and Empress Elisabeth of Austria and Hungary (Leerssen 2021b). These figures combine high social status with femininity at a tender age, involving sentimental charm and 'soft' virtues such as Biedermeier audiences liked to see them.

Their enduring appeal across the twentieth century is plainly visible in their most prominent cultural successors: 'Disney Princess' from Snow White to Pocahontas and

Mulan. To place these legendary princesses at the centre of a fundamental national crisis or transition moment (whenever that took place, but at any rate in proto-historical time, for instance as 'Last Pagans') was obviously an appealing cultural trope for the national-romantic imagination. It made it possible for legendary tales to transition from the field of history into that of literature.

Figure 1. Lithuanian postage stamp, 2006, marking the centenary of the first national opera, *Birutė*. ERNiE imagebank http://ernie.uva.nl (public domain).

**Conclusion: Feminine Charms in Proto-Historical Conflicts**

The legends surveyed here show marked typological similarities, especially as regards the prominent role given to a young, female protagonist from the tribal elite of the primitive nation. The dates which these legends evoke are widely spaced: the second/third century AD for Gaulish Norma and Velléda, the early fourth century for Batavian Hermingard, the eighth and ninth centuries for the Basque Amaya and Slavic Bogomila, Wanda and Libuše, and the fourteenth century for the Lithuanian Birutė. The first formulation of the legends involved is also disparate: medieval and late-medieval

chronicle-legends for Wanda and Libuše and (later) Birutė, early-nineteenth-century fictional narratives for all the others. But all of them are strongly contemporary in their national canonisation trajectory: their status as exemplary national figures is part and parcel of nineteenth-century romantic nationalism.

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# LISTRÆNAR BALLÖÐUR: FRÁ HEFÐBUNDNUM SAGNADÖNSUM TIL HÖFUNDARVERKA 18. OG 19. ALDAR

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Seint á 18. öld fóru skáld í Þýskalandi og á Englandi að yrkja nýstárleg ljóð sem voru þó byggð á gömlum grunni. Þetta voru listrænar ballöður sem líktust um margt hefðbundnum sagnadönsum. Þær urðu þáttur í þróun rómantísku stefnunnar og þekktar víða um lönd. Íslensk skáld ortu líka kvæði af þessu tagi en lítið hefur verið um þau fjallað. Í greininni verður rakin saga listrænna ballaða og byrjað á fyrirrennunum þeirra, hefðbundnum sagnadönsum. Þá verður hugað að frumortum og þýddum kvæðum sem sýna hvernig ballaðan birtist í íslenskum bókmenntum 19. aldar. Að lokum verða þrjú kvæði könnuð nánar í þessu samhengi en þau eru „Kötlukvísl“ eftir Bjarna Thorarensen, „Barnafoss“ eftir Grím Thomsen og „Eggert Ólafsson“ eftir Matthías Jochumsson.

**1. Hefðbundnir sagnadansar**

Hefðbundnir eða alþýðlegir sagnadansar (e. *traditional ballads*, þ. *Volksballaden*) eru dramatísk söguljóð sem urðu útbreidd á síðmiðöldum. Þeir voru vinsælir víða í Evrópu, allt frá Spáni í suðri (sp. *romances*) til Danmerkur í norðri (d. *folkeviser*) og frá Íslandi í vestri (ísl. *dans, fornkvæði, sagnadansar*) til Rússlands í austri (rússn. *byliny*). Sagnadansar varðveittust framan af í munnlegri geymd og voru lifandi þáttur í alþýðuskemmtun, tónlist og dansi en á árnýöld var farið að skrifa þá niður og safna þeim saman. Þegar þjóðlegum fræðum í Evrópu óx fiskur um hrygg á 18. og 19. öld var litið á hefðbundna sagnadansa sem þjóðkvæði enda voru höfundar þeirra óþekktir. Þeir voru álitnir mikilvægur menningararfur sem þyrfti að sinna og búa til útgáfu. Texta af þessu tagi er að finna í ýmsum útgáfum frá 18. öld og síðar, allt frá *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (ritstj. Thomas Percy 1765) og *Volkslieder* (ritstj. Johann Gottfried Herder 1778–1779) til

* Háskóli Íslands.

*Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (ritstj. Svend Grundtvig, Axel Olrik o.fl. 1853–1976) og *Íslenzkra fornkvæða* (ritstj. Svend Grundtvig og Jón Sigurðsson 1854–1885). Sagnadansar eru því dæmi um munnlega hefð sem upphaflega tengist alþýðuskemmtun en endar sem prentaðir textar á bók. Meðal sumra þjóða, til dæmis Færeyinga, eru sagnadansar þó enn kveðnir munnlega í hópdansi á þjóðlegum viðburðum.

Yrkisefni sagnadansa eru fjölbreytt en talsvert ber á hefðarheimi miðalda með riddurum og frúm, köppum og helgum mönnum. Til eru gamansamir sagnadansar en oftar er þó ort um ástir og dauða á örlagaþrunginn hátt. Samskipti kynjanna eru í brennidepli og hlutskipti kvenna kemur mikið við sögu, sem og kynferðislegt ofbeldi (Ingibjörg Eyþórsdóttir 2018). Framvindan er hröð og dramatísk með samtölum eða tilsvörum. Frásagnaraðferðin er hlutlæg. Bragarhættir sagnadansa eru með ýmsu móti en algengt er að þeir skiptist í erindi með endarími og þeim fylgja oft stef eða viðlög, eitt eða tvö (dæmi: „Kóngurinn spurði dóttur klár: / – *þegar á úngum aldri* – / „viltu giptast í ár?“ / – *lifi eg enn, og leik eg mér aldrei*“, sbr. *Íslenzk fornkvæði* I, 355; skáletur höf.). Hrynjandin er frjálsleg og rímið líka. Í íslenskum sagnadönsum er stuðlasetningin óregluleg og rímið getur verið vanalegt eða af því tagi sem kallast assónans. Þá er áherslusérhljóð í rímorðunum hið sama en eftirfarandi hljóð ólíkt (dæmi: *hart – sprakk*; *fimm – minn*) en einnig getur verið um skothent rím að ræða (dæmi: *sinn – enn*; *spora – dyra*). Algengt er að erindin séu fjórar línur hvert og önnur og fjórða lína látnar ríma saman (xaya). Stíllinn er einfaldur og alþýðlegur. Endurtekningar í orðalagi eru algengar, ekki aðeins í viðlögunum heldur líka í erindunum sjálfum. Til að mynda kemur fyrir fast orðalag (formúla) eins og „Það er/var hann“ að viðbættu mannsnafni (dæmi: „Það var hann Logi í Vallarhlíð“ og „Það var hann Þorkell Þrándarson“, sbr. *Íslenzk fornkvæði* I, 243; II, 314–15). Meðal þekktra íslenskra sagnadansa eru „Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós“ og „Tristramskvæði“ (Vésteinn Ólason 1979 og 1982; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021, 231–49).

## 2. Listrænar ballöður

Þó að *Reliques* Percys og *Volkslieder* Herders væru ekki vísindalegar útgáfur vöktu þær verðskuldaða athygli á hefðbundnum sagnadönsum. Ekki leið á löngu áður en evrópsk skáld fóru að yrkja kvæði í svipuðum dúr enda bjó þessi alþýðlega hefð yfir einfaldleika og örlagaþunga sem höfðaði sterkt til tilfinninganna og ímyndunaraflsins. Slík kvæði sem nafngreind skáld yrkja undir beinum eða óbeinum áhrifum frá hefðbundnum sagnadönsum eru kölluð listrænar ballöður (e. *literary ballads*, þ. *Kunstballaden*). Meðal þekktra kvæða sem þýsk skáld ortu í ballöðustíl eru „Lenore“ (1773) eftir Gottfried August Bürger (1747–1794), „Erlkönig“ (1782) eftir Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) og „Der Taucher“ (1797) eftir Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805). Tengsl frumortu kvæðanna við útgáfustarfið má meðal annars ráða af því að Goethe orti „Erlkönig“ undir áhrifum frá „Erlkönigs Tochter“ sem Herder hafði birt í *Volkslieder* (II, 1779, 158–60) og var þýðing hans á danska sagnadansinum „Elverskud“ (Rix 2022, 2–7; „Elverskud“ er náskyldur „Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós“). Þannig átti þessi alþýðlega hefð sér framhaldslíf í útgáfum, þýðingum og skapandi umritunum af ýmsu tagi. Ensku skáldin

William Wordsworth (1770–1850) og Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) sóttu líka innblástur í ballöðuhefðina þegar þeir gáfu út *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) en sú bók er talin marka upphaf rómantísku stefnunnar í enskum bókmenntum. Yngri skáld eins og John Keats (1795–1821) ortu líka kvæði í ballöðustíl og má þar nefna „La Belle Dame sans Merci“ (1819), samtalskvæði ljóðmælanda og riddara sem álfkona hefur hneppt í álög. Heimur miðalda er því oft skammt undan í listrænum ballöðum en þá sem ímyndun. Kvæðagreinin gengur að mörgu leyti út á að vekja óljósar hugmyndir um sameiginlega fortíð manna frá því fyrir daga nútímavæðingar, allt aftur í gráa forneskju (Atkinson 2018, 1–29).

Yfirnáttúruleg öfl og ill örlög urðu vinsælt yrkisefni í listrænum ballöðum. Þýsku skáldin lögðu mikið upp úr gotneskum þáttum, óhugnaði og hryllingi þó að þau slægju líka á ljúfari strengi (Thomson 2012). „Lenore“ Bürgers endar með láti ungrar konu, „Erlkönig“ Goethes með láti ungs drengs og „Der Taucher“ Schillers með drukknun ungs manns. Yfirnáttúruleg öfl koma við sögu í fyrri kvæðunum tveimur – bölbæn og afturgenginn maður hjá Bürger, álfkonungur hjá Goethe – en hjá Schiller er það valdasjúkur og illgjarn konungur sem veldur dauða unga mannsins með því að láta hann ítrekað kafa eftir bikar í ólgandi hafdjúpi. Wordsworth og Coleridge þekktu vel til þýskra ballöðuskálda en sóttu meira til bresku hefðarinnar eins og hún birtist til dæmis í útgáfu Percys á enskum og skoskum sagnadönsum. Wordsworth taldi að þýsku skáldin hefðu gengið of langt í gotnesku og hryllingi. Hann og Coleridge vildu endurvekja alþýðlegt og einfalt mál eins og það sem þeir þekktu úr bresku sagnadönsunum (Parrish 1973, 121–48). Lýsingar á lífi alþýðunnar og nánum tengslum við náttúruna voru Wordsworth ofarlega í huga og hann varð eitt helsta náttúruskáld evrópskrar rómantíkur (McKusick 2020). Yfirnáttúruleg öfl og þjóðtrú koma þó einnig við sögu í *Lyrical Ballads* og þá sérstaklega hjá Coleridge en hjá Wordsworth eru þau iðulega afhjúpuð sem hindurvitni alþýðunnar (Rix 2022, 18–19).

Eitt þekktasta kvæðið í bókinni er „The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere“ eftir Coleridge (Wordsworth og Coleridge 1798, 1–52). Þar segir frá sæfara sem verður það á að skjóta albatross í Suðurhöfum og iðrast þess sárlega. Hann sannfærist um að með drápi fuglsins hafi hann kallað ógæfu yfir sig og skipsfélaga sína sem deyja einn af öðrum. Sæfarinn snýr aftur til síns heima sakbitinn maður. Hann fer í ævilanga yfirbótargöngu og segir sögu sína hverjum sem heyra vill um leið og hann boðar að elska eigi allt sem anda dregur. Aldinn að árum stöðvar hann ungan gest á leið til brúðkaups og rekur raunir sínar fyrir honum til varnaðar þeim sem kunna að miklast af oflæti. Gesturinn bregst við sögu hans og þetta er því samtalskvæði. Coleridge og Wordsworth lögðu oft meiri áherslu á mannlegt eðli og breyskleika en þýsku ballöðuskáldin, hvort sem það var tengdara náttúru eða yfirnáttúru. Í sjálfsævisögu sinni, *Biographia Literaria*, sagði Coleridge (2014, 207–208) að með kvæðum sínum í *Lyrical Ballads* hefði hann reynt að varpa ljósi á ímyndunarafl og sálarlíf þeirra sem tryðu á yfirnáttúruleg öfl. Markmiðið hefði aldrei verið að gera hinu yfirnáttúrulega skil sem slíku heldur væri það þáttur í skáldlegri lýsingu hans á hugarheimi og ímyndunum alþýðufólks.

Listrænar ballöður eru höfundarverk og hluti af prentmenningu 18. og 19. aldar. Þær tilheyra því annarri samfélagsgerð og framleiðsluháttum en hefðbundnir sagnadansar miðalda þó að þeir hafi líka endað á bók sem prentaðir textar á síðari öldum. Þær verða því ekki til í lifandi samhengi hópdans og alþýðuskemmtunar þó að einstök ballöðuskáld 18. og 19. aldar hafi reynt að líkja eftir alþýðlegum stíl sagnadansanna. Ef listrænar ballöður voru sungnar (ýmsar þýskar ballöður öðluðust alþjóðlegar vinsældir við sönglög tónskálda á borð við Schubert, Schumann og Liszt) var það því í öðru samhengi en á miðöldum. Þetta voru prentaðir textar og þeir voru aðallega lesnir sem slíkir. Það segir líka sína sögu að stef eða viðlög eru fátíð í listrænum ballöðum enda tengdust þau söng og dansi á fyrri tíð. Auk þess eru listrænar ballöður yfirleitt mun reglulegar kveðnar en hefðbundnir sagnadansar sem eru frjálslegir í forminu.

Til samanburðar má setja þessi einkenni upp í töflu 1:

**Tafla 1.**

| **Hefðbundnir sagnadansar** | **Listrænar ballöður** |
|---|---|
| Söguljóð með hraðri framvindu | Söguljóð með hraðri framvindu |
| Dramatík, samtöl og tilsvör | Dramatík, samtöl og tilsvör |
| Einfaldur stíll og setningagerð | Einfaldur stíll og setningagerð |
| Endurtekningar og formúlukennt orðalag | Endurtekningar og formúlukennt orðalag |
| Hið örlagaþrungna og (yfir)náttúrulega | Hið örlagaþrungna og (yfir)náttúrulega |
| Frjálslegir bragarhættir og rím (assónans) | Reglulegir bragarhættir og rím |
| Alþýðuskemmtun | Listrænn alþýðleiki |
| Munnleg hefð | Prentmenning |
| Þjóðkvæði | Höfundarverk |
| Dans og söngur | Lestur og flutningur |
| Stef eða viðlög algeng (tengd tónlist og dansi) | Stef eða viðlög fátíð |

## 3. Íslensk ballöðuskáld

Þórir Óskarsson (2008, 444–46) benti á það í kafla um íslenska bókmenntasögu að ýmis kvæði 19. aldar gætu talist ballöður. Ég vék líka að þessu efni í annarri bókmenntasögu og tengdi kvæðin við rómantískar hugmyndir um alþýðlegan einfaldleika sem íslensk skáld virðast frekar hafa talið sig finna í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum en í rímnahefðinni (Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 2021, 457–58). Hér verður þessum ábendingum fylgt eftir og gerð nánari grein fyrir listrænum ballöðum nokkurra íslenskra skálda. Þórunn Sigurðardóttir (2023) hefur nýlega sýnt fram á að svokallaðar fréttaballöður hafi verið ortar hér á landi á 17. öld og ólíkar birtingarmyndir ballöðunnar í íslenskri bókmenntasögu eru því smám saman að koma í ljós.

Taka má nokkur kvæði, bæði frumort og þýdd, til marks um landnám listrænu ballöðunnar á 19. öld. Árið 1824 orti Bjarni Thorarensen (1786–1841) kvæðið

„Kötlukvísl.“ Árið 1836 birtust í *Ljóðasmámunum* Sigurðar Breiðfjörðs (1798–1846) kvæðin „Úthýsing“ og „Meyjar drukknan.“ Árið 1837 birtist í tímaritinu *Fjölni* kvæðið „Móðurást“ eftir Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–1845). Það var tilbrigði við þýðingu Árna Helgasonar (1777–1869) á norsku kvæði, „Betlersken på Hittersøen“ eftir Conrad Nicolai Schwach (1793–1860), sem hafði birst í *Sunnanpóstinum* 1835. Árið 1868 birtist í landsfréttablaðinu *Þjóðólfi* kvæðið „Barnafoss“ eftir Grím Thomsen (1820–1896). Árið 1877 kom út bókin *Svanhvít* með ljóðaþýðingum Matthíasar Jochumssonar (1835–1920) og Steingríms Thorsteinssonar (1831–1913). Framarlega í bókinni voru kvæði Schillers, „Kafarinn“ („Der Taucher“, 1797) og „Greifinn af Habsborg“ („Der Graf von Habsburg“, 1803), auk kvæðisins „Söngvarinn“ („Der Sänger“, 1783) eftir Goethe, öll í þýðingu Steingríms. Árið 1878 birti Matthías kvæðið „Eggert Ólafsson“ í blaðinu *Þjóðólfi*. „Álfkonungurinn“, þýðing Steingríms á „Erlkönig“ Goethes (1782), birtist svo í tímaritinu *Eimreiðinni* 1896.

Öll eiga þessi kvæði það sameiginlegt að vera listrænar ballöður. Þegar hefur verið fjallað um þýsku ballöðuhefðina sem flest þýddu ljóðin eru dæmi um en hér verður hugað nánar að hinum frumortu kvæðum Bjarna Thorarensens, Gríms Thomsens og Matthíasar Jochumssonar. „Móðurást“ Jónasar Hallgrímssonar telst frekar til þýðinga en frumortra kvæða (Páll Valsson 1989, 126–29) og verður ekki tekin sérstaklega fyrir hér. Í kvæðinu er fjallað um förukonu sem verður úti en nær að skýla ungum syni sínum svo að hann lifir kuldann af. Þórir Óskarsson (2008, 445) hefur áður gert „Úthýsingu“ og „Meyjar drukknan“ skil í ljósi ballöðuhefðarinnar. Sigurður Breiðfjörð yrkir þar um alþýðlegt og harmrænt efni eins og Jónas gerir í útleggingu sinni. „Úthýsing“ segir sögu fátækrar og illa klæddrar stúlku sem leitar á náðir bónda í vetrarhríð en hann neitar henni um húsaskjól og hún deyr úr kulda; hann verður svo úti í framhaldinu. „Meyjar drukknan“ segir frá móður sem sendir unga dóttur sína um haustnótt niður að sjó til að sinna erindum fyrir sig en þar nær nykur henni og hún drukknar; móðirin deyr svo úr harmi. Listræna ballaðan er það bókmenntaform sem skáldin velja til að segja dramatískar harmsögur af þessu tagi.

### *3.1 Bjarni Thorarensen: „Kötlukvísl“ og gotneskur hryllingur*

Árið 1824 gerði Bjarni Thorarensen tilraun um listræna ballöðu í kvæðinu „Kötlukvísl“ („Drynur und' fjallsrótum, dimm eruský“). Hann var sér meðvitaður um það eins og sjá má á bréfi sem hann sendi Finni Magnússyni með kvæðinu 3. mars 1824 (Bjarni Thorarensen 1943, 161):

> Þetta Form, Ballade-Formid ɔ :, er nú lítt þekkt í Islendskum Skáldskap og kannské þad því giöri ei Lucku hiá Almenningi, en þad er mér vest og eg hefi Skrápinn hardann, en vænt þækti mér ad heyra Þánka þína um bædi Qvædin helst um þad eptir Öefiord [þ.e. „Kötlukvísl“] hvört eg hefi gétað hitt Romance-Tóninn og hvört hann eigi ecki allvel vid þesshättar Erfiljód eptir Menn sem farast sviplega.

Bjarni ræðir hér jöfnum höndum um „Ballade-Formid“ og „Romance-Tóninn“ en með því síðara á hann væntanlega við þau sungnu söguljóð sem voru kölluð *romances* (et.

*romance*) og upprunnin voru á Spáni. Þessi spænska ballöðuhefð var þá orðin þekkt í Norður-Evrópu og þýsk skáld eins og Goethe, Schiller og Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) ortu kvæði í rómönsustíl (Daub 2022, 10–43). Forvitnileg tilraun Bjarna um ballöðuformið kom þó ekki fyrir augu almennings fyrr en að honum látnum þegar „Kötlukvísl“ (undir heitinu „Þórarinn Öfjord“) kom út í *Kvæðum* hans árið 1847. Kvæðið, sem varðveitt er í mörgum uppskriftum, lifði þó sínu lífi í handritamenningu 19. aldar eins og Þórir Óskarsson (2008, 445) bendir á:

> *Kötlukvísl* hafði raunar nokkur áhrif á íslenskan skáldskap áður en kvæðið var prentað, eins og glöggt má sjá af kvæði Jónasar Hallgrímssonar *Móðurást* („Fýkur yfir hæðir og frostkaldan mel“; 1837) og þýðingu hans á *Des Mädchens Klage* Schillers sem *Meyjargráti* (1843). Ekki aðeins eru bæði ort undir sama bragarhætti og *Kötlukvísl* heldur vitna þau einnig um bein rittengsl við það, sbr. „Dunar í trjálundi, dimm þjóta ský, / döpur situr smámeyja hvamminum í“ úr *Meyjargráti*.

Í „Kötlukvísl“ yrkir Bjarni um sviplega atburði stuttu eftir að þeir áttu sér stað. Sumarið 1823 hafði Katla gosið og valdið jökulhlaupi á Mýrdalssandi (Guðrún Larsen 2018, 30–33). Nokkrir menn drukknuðu í vatnavöxtum í Kötlukvísl í september og þar á meðal frændi Bjarna og mágur, Þórarinn Öefjord sýslumaður (f. 1793). Bjarni yrkir kvæði sitt inn í þýsku hefðina með sínum yfirnáttúrulegu öflum og gotneska hryllingi. Í fyrsta erindinu er það „meinvættur“ í Skaftafellsjökli sem „magnar þá dynki“ sem drynja „und' fjallsrótum“ og í öðru erindinu er dregin upp gotnesk lýsing á Kötluhlaupi (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 127):

> Jökulfljót rennur af sandinum svart
> sent uppúr náheimum berg gegnum hart,
> dökk gnæfa feigðarkuml eyrinni á,
> sem ógróin leiði' yfir jörðuðum ná
> um kirkjugarð strjállega standa.

Inn í þetta feigðarríki ríða svo mennskir menn sem mega sín lítils gagnvart dauðanum en hann er persónugerður í kvæðinu: „dauðinn úr launsátri fjallsrótum frá / framhljóp í öldu úr jökli hvítblá“ (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 128). Framvindan er hröð eins og í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum. Mennirnir reyna hvað þeir geta en þá „drynur í fjallsrótum! dauðinn því frá / dapurri í jöklinum meinvætti þá / framvalt í annari öldu“ (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 129). Þeir drukkna þar einn af öðrum.

Orðaskipti og tilsvör eru algeng í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum enda eru þeir dramatísk söguljóð. Ballöðuskáldið Bjarni nýtir sér þetta listræna bragð á ögurstundu í kvæðinu. Í 4. erindi fær dauðinn orðið og mennirnir bregðast síðan við (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 128):

> Drynur und' fjallsrótum, dimm eru ský,
> dauðinn þar kallar: „Ó! leggið útí.“
> Benedikt, Öefiord og presturinn Páll,

prúðmennin, segja þá „fær er sá áll“ –
en þeim varð hann bana þó bylgja!

Í kvæðinu er sjónum sérstaklega beint að Þórarni Öefiord og örlög hans hörmuð fyrir hönd þjóðarinnar (11. erindi, Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 129):

Með Þórarni Öefiord í unnir þar hné
atgjörvi og ráðvendni jafnan í té,
aldurtjón snillingur ungur þar beið,
en alséðan fósturjörð skaða þar leið –
Sá helzt til var harmurinn þungur!

Í lokaerindinu er lesandinn ávarpaður og hvattur til að forðast „að ríða þann feigðar um sand, / í fjallinu er Katla, og ætlar þér grand, / kaldhlátur dauða þar gellur í gjá“ (Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 129).

Bjarni kallar kvæðið ballöðu með rómönsutóni og efnislega sver það sig í ætt við slíkan kveðskap. Þórir Óskarsson (2008, 444) bendir á að „[t]engsl kvæðisins við evrópska ballöðuhefð birtist þó einnig og ekki síður í því að ort er undir kunnum bragarhætti úr kvæði Schillers *Des Mädchens Klage* (1798).“ Bjarni beitir auk þess endurtekningum í anda ballöðuhefðarinnar. 1. og 4. erindið byrjar á sömu línu, „Drynur und' fjallsrótum, dimm eru ský,“ og í 9. erindi er hluti línunnar endurtekinn: „það drynur í fjallsrótum!“ Með þessu kvæði sló hann nýjan tón í íslenskri ljóðagerð sem ómaði áfram í kvæðum síðari skálda. Ákveðinn samhljómur er að minnsta kosti með „Kötlukvísl.“og ballöðu Matthíasar Jochumssonar um Eggert Ólafsson eins og síðar verður rakið.

*3.2 Grímur Thomsen: „Barnafoss“ og gýgurin sem tælir*

Grímur Thomsen gaf út fyrstu ljóðabók sína sextugur að aldri árið 1880 en stök kvæði eftir hann höfðu áður birst í ýmsum tíma- og safnritum. Kvæði hans „Barnafoss“, sem ort var 1866, birtist í *Þjóðólfi* 1868 eins og áður segir og svo í *Ljóðmælum* 1880. Hróður Gríms sem skálds fór vaxandi á þessum árum. Einkum þótti „hinn góði og stórmerki *ballade*-kveðskapur“ hans sæta tíðindum eins og Matthías Jochumsson (1922, 291) kemst að orði í æviminningum sínum, *Sögukaflar af sjálfum mér*. „Barnafoss“ er eitt af þeim kvæðum hans sem kalla má ballöður enda segir það dramatíska sögu í þjóðlegum stíl.

Kvæðið hefst á erindi sem gæti verið gamall húsgangur (Þórður Helgason 2012, 155) en minnir mikið á sagnadansa eða þjóðvísur (Grímur Thomsen 1969, 66):

Stíga þau dans í strjálum skóg,
er stjarnan skín í vestri,
og tóa þýtur: ga-ga-gó,
en gengið er frá lestri.

Grímur byggir kvæðið á sögn um drukknun tveggja drengja í Hvítá í Borgarfirði. Sagt er að þeir hafi hætt sér út á náttúrulegan steinboga yfir foss í ánni sem síðan er kallaður

Barnafoss eins og kemur fram í *Íslenzkum þjóðsögum og æfintýrum* Jóns Árnasonar (1864, 102–3). Aðra gerð sagnarinnar er að finna í ritinu *Úr byggðum Borgarfjarðar* (Kristleifur Þorsteinsson 1948, 276). Kvæði Gríms fer að sumu leyti nær þeirri gerð því að þeim er sameiginlegt að ræða um börn (ekki drengi eins og hjá Jóni Árnasyni) og atburðurinn á sér stað á jólanótt (ekki á sunnudegi eins og hjá Jóni Árnasyni, sbr. Hallfreð Örn Eiríksson 1982, 167). Í sögninni falla drengirnir/börnin af steinboganum ofan í ána en í kvæði Gríms brotnar steinboginn undan þeim og þannig drukkna börnin. Í sögninni eru drengirnir/börnin vöruð við því að fara frá heimabæ sínum og beðin um að vera heima við þegar fólk heldur til kirkju en þeir/þau standast ekki mátið og halda af stað. Grímur (1969, 66) ræðir um breyskleika barnanna í því sambandi sem minnir á ensku hefðina:

> Þau langaði til að leika sér
> í lundinum, þar sem fossinn er,
> sigrað fékk ei boð né bann
> þann breyskleikann.

„Barnafoss“ er dramatískt söguljóð með tilsvörum eins og algengt er í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum. Gýgur (fossbúi) fær orðið um miðbik kvæðisins og ávarpar börnin. Henni er ekki sjálfrátt – „Um aldur og æfi ein eg sit, / yndisvana, föl á lit“ (Grímur Thomsen 1969, 67) – enda föst í álögum sem börn ein geta leyst hana úr með hörmulegum afleiðingum fyrir þau sjálf. Gýgurin leikur á hörpu og nær að heilla þau:

> Þau gleymdu bæði stað og stund,
> sturlaði fossinn börnum lund;
> en mökkva fyrir mána dró
> og myrkti skóg.

Á samri stundu brestur steinbrúin og börnin falla í ána. Framvindan er því hröð eins og allajafna í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum og listrænum ballöðum. Kvæðið kallast ekki aðeins á við íslenska heldur einnig erlenda þjóðtrú. Seiðmagn gýgjarinnar minnir á ljóð (þ. *Lied*) eins og „Die Lorelei“ (1824) eftir Heinrich Heine, þar sem kvenvættur á bergi við ána Rín heillar farmann svo að fley hans ferst (Hallfreður Örn Eiríksson 1982, 168). „Barnafoss“ Gríms líkist auk þess ýmsum listrænum ballöðum þýskra skálda sem fjalla um yfirnáttúruleg öfl eða náttúruvætti sem grípa inn í mannlífið. Í „Erlkönig“ Goethes tekur álfkonungur ungan dreng til sín eftir að hafa freistað hans með ýmsum hætti. Benda má á ákveðin líkindi með loforðum hans og gýjarinnar (Goethe 1896, 233 (Goethe og Schiller 1853, 33–35); Grímur Thomsen 1969, 68):

1. Lofað er leikjum: Álfkonungurinn segist ætla að kenna drengnum „hina fegurstu leiki“ („Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir“); gýgurin lofar börnunum því að „um dagana skulum leika oss.“
2. Lofað er eftirsóknarverðum hlutum: Álfkonungurinn: „Mín strönd er af glitblómum fegurstu full / Og föt á mín móðir, er skína sem gull“ („Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand; / Meine Mutter hat manch' gülden Gewand“); gýgurin: „Í djúpinu á eg dýrðleg hnoss.“

3. Lofað er blíðu og værð: Álfkonungurinn kveðst eiga dætur „sem dilla þjer rótt, / Svo dreymi þig sætt um þá værustu nótt“ („Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reih'n, / Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein“); gýgurin segir að eftir leiki daganna muni hún og börnin „blunda loks við blíðan koss / af björtum foss.“

Þannig er ákveðinn samhljómur með fagurgala álfkonungsins og gýjarinnar í kvæðum Goethes og Gríms. Munurinn er þó sá að börnin láta heillast en drengurinn ekki og álfkonungurinn tekur hann þá með valdi.

Verur sem halda til í fossum eða ám og leika á hljóðfæri (fiðlu eða hörpu) eru líka þekktar í norrænni þjóðtrú (no. *nøkk*, sæ. *näck*, skylt ísl. *nykur*) og gömlum sagnadönsum (Strömbäck 1967, 436–37). Þær eru yfirleitt í karlmannsmynd og geta reynt að tæla fólk ofan í vatnið en aðrar eru meinlausari. Sænska skáldið Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823) orti kvæðið „Näcken“ (1821) um lækjarbúa sem leikur á fiðlu og fyllir náttúruna af lífi. Ungur drengur heyrir fiðluleikinn að kvöldi dags og ávarpar veruna. Hann kveðst vorkenna henni að vera náttúruafl sem aldrei muni öðlast sáluhjálp eins og guðs börn. Lækjarbúinn fellir tár við þessi tíðindi og leikur ekki framar á fiðluna sína (Stagnelius 2013, 138–39). Gýgur Gríms er líka brjóstumkennanleg í álögum sínum og leikur á hljóðfæri (hörpu) í straumi en að öðru leyti virðist hún skyldari þýskum en norrænum náttúruvættum.

### *3.3 Matthías Jochumsson: „Eggert Ólafsson“ og oflæti hetjunnar*

Matthías Jochumsson kunni að meta þau kvæði Gríms Thomsens sem sóttu í ballöðuhefðina eins og áður segir. Hann tók sig svo til og orti sjálfur kvæði í þessum anda sem kannski er besta dæmið um listræna ballöðu í íslenskum bókmenntum 19. aldar.

Sumarið 1878 tók Matthías sér far með strandferðaskipinu Díönu frá Reykjavík vestur og norður um land. Hann lýsti ferðinni í greinum sem birtust í blaðinu *Þjóðólfi* sem hann ritstýrði 1874–1880. Í ferðinni var siglt um Breiðafjörðinn og í lýsingunni á honum birtir Matthías kvæði sitt „Eggert Ólafsson.“ Náttúrufræðingurinn og upplýsingarmaðurinn Eggert Ólafsson (f. 1726) og kona hans Ingibjörg Guðmundsdóttir (f. 1734) höfðu drukknað í Breiðafirði vorið 1768. Þau voru þá nýlega gift og hugðust flytja búslóð sína frá Skor á sunnanverðum Vestfjörðum yfir á Snæfellsnes en báturinn var ofhlaðinn og fórst í slæmu veðri (Daði Níelsson 1921–1923; Grímur Thomsen 1879). Matthías minnist hér löngu liðins atburðar sem lifað hafði í þjóðarsálinni en Bjarni Thorarensen orti kvæði sitt um dauðastríð manna sem höfðu drukknað fyrir skömmu. Báðir velja þeir listrænu ballöðuna til að gera harmrænu efni skil.

Kvæði Matthíasar sver sig frekar í ætt við ensku ballöðuhefðina en þá þýsku. Blikur eru á lofti í byrjun kvæðisins en það er ekki yfirnáttúra eða gotneskur óhugnaður heldur öllu frekar sá kvíði eða beygur sem birtist oft í íslenskum þjóðsögum og kvæðum

(Ólafur Briem 1980, 51–52). Kvæðið um Eggert Ólafsson byrjar þó á svipaðan hátt og „Kötlukvísl“ Bjarna:

„Drynur und' fjallsrótum, dimm eru ský“
(Bjarni Thorarensen 1935, 127);
„Þrútið var loft og þungur sjór, / þokudrungað vor“
(Matthías Jochumsson 1980, 164).

Af íslensku kvæðunum sem hér eru til umfjöllunar fer þetta næst hefðbundnum sagnadönsum í formi, stíl og efnistökum. Matthías yrkir það undir svipuðum hætti og Coleridge notar í kvæðinu um aldna sæfarann. Hvert erindi er fjórar línur; fjögur atkvæði eru í fyrstu og þriðju línu en þrjú atkvæði í annarri og fjórðu línu; rímið er xaya. Þetta er algengur háttur í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum þó að hér sé reglulegar kveðið en í munnlegu hefðinni og Matthías noti ávallt tvo stuðla á móti höfuðstaf eins og íslenskar bragreglur kveða á um. Segja má að sagnamaðurinn sem situr við sjóinn í byrjun kvæðisins („Gamall þulur hjá græði sat, / geigur var svip hans í“) sé ígildi aldna sæfarans hjá Coleridge sem varar við því að ofmetnast gagnvart náttúrunni. „Mér ógna þau vinda-ský“ segir hann en Eggert svarar að bragði (Matthías Jochumsson 1980, 164):

„Ég sigli' ei skýin, ég sigli sjá!“
svaraði kappinn og hló;
„ég trúi á Guð, en grýlur ei,
og gleð mig við reiðan sjó.“

Neðanmáls í grein sinni í *Þjóðólfi* segir Matthías (1878, 77):

> Það er sögn manna, að áður en Eggert léti frá landi, hafi maður nokkur gamall latt hann að sigla þann dag, og bent honum á skýin, og hafi þá Eggert svarað: „Eg ætla ekki að sigla á skýjunum.“ Einnig er það haft eptir skipverjum þess skips, er fylgdi Eggerti og afkomst, að það hafi þeir séð til ferða hans síðast, að holbára féll yfir skutinn og tók konu hans út af búlkanum. Hafi þeir þá séð E. stökkva fyrir borð sem hafi hann ætlað að bjarga henni með sundi; en í þeirri svipan hvarf þeim skipið og alltsaman.

Í kvæðinu lætur Eggert viðvörun gamla mannsins sem vind um eyru þjóta, vindur upp segl og sest sjálfur við stýrið. Næstu þrjú erindi sýna vald Matthíasar á dramatíska söguljóðinu (1980, 164–65):

Knúðu rastir knerrir tveir,
komið var rok um svið;
síðasti fugl úr fjarri Skor
flögraði' á vinstri hlið.

Á búlkanum situr brúður ung,
bleik var hin göfga kinn:
„Ó, Guð! sú báran er brött og há,

hún brotnar í himininn inn!“

„Hækkið þið seglin!“ hetjan kvað,
en Helja skjótari varð;
boðinn skall yfir báru-mar, –
í búlkann var komið skarð.

Hvasst er orðið á Breiðafirði og Skor er langt að baki. Framvindan er hröð að hætti hefðbundinna sagnadansa en skáldið skýtur inn einstökum tilsvörum til að undirbyggja dramatíkina. Annars vegar eru örvæntingarorð hinnar ungu konu Eggerts sem látin er sitja á búlkanum og þannig sett í hættu ef skipið hallast (*búlki* er hlaði eða vörubunki á þilfari). Hins vegar eru orð Eggerts um að seglin verði hækkuð til að bregðast við brattri og hárri öldunni en það er of seint. Brúður hans er komin í sjóinn en það er ekki sagt beint heldur að skarð sé nú komið í búlkann þar sem hún sat (*báru-mar* er skipskenning).

Í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum kemur fyrir áðurnefnt orðalag eða formúla, „Það er/var hann“ að viðbættu mannsnafni („Það var hann Þorkell Þrándarson“ o.s.frv). Matthías notar þessa formúlu og hún bindur kvæðið saman með endurtekningu. „Það var hann Eggert Ólafsson“ kemur þannig fyrir í 1., 5., 8. og 9. erindi kvæðisins. Jónas Hallgrímsson hafði notað þetta sama orðalag á tveimur stöðum í „Hulduljóðum“ sem helguð eru Eggerti Ólafssyni. Smali er látinn kveða þrjú síðustu erindi „Hulduljóða“ enda sverja þau sig í ætt við hjarðljóðaraunir eða pastoral elegíu (Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson 1999, 101–10). Smalinn lofsyngur Eggert og harmar örlög hans fyrir hönd þjóðarinnar. Erindi smalans eru í einföldum og alþýðlegum stíl sem minnir á sagnadansa. Síðasta erindi „Hulduljóða“ er svohljóðandi (Jónas Hallgrímsson 1989, 123):

„Það var hann Eggert Ólafsson,
allir lofa þann snilldarmann,
Ísland hefir ei eignast son,
öflgari stoð né betri’ en hann;
þegar hann sigldi sjóinn á
söknuður vætti marga brá;
nú er hann kominn á lífsins láð
og lifir þar sæll fyrir drottins náð.“

Í kvæði sínu (10. erindi) vísar Matthías (1980, 165) í þetta erindi Jónasar og endursegir orð smalans:

„Það var hann Eggert Ólafsson“
– Ísalands vættur kvað –;
„aldregi græt ég annan meir
en afreks-mennið það.“

Þannig tengist kvæði Matthíasar bæði „Hulduljóðum“ Jónasar og þeirri hefð sagnadansa sem þeir báðir vísa í. Jónas hefur þekkt til þessarar munnlegu hefðar þó að hann lifði það ekki að sjá prentaða útgáfu Svends Grundtvig og Jóns Sigurðssonar á

sagnadönsum (*Íslenzk fornkvæði* I, 1854). Sú útgáfa hefur væntanlega orðið skáldum eins og Matthíasi hvatning til að yrkja kvæði í þessum stíl.

Eggert er kallaður „kappinn“ (3. erindi), „með formanns þor“ (5. erindi), „hetjan“ (8. erindi) og „afreks-mennið“ (10. erindi). Í 9. erindi stekkur hann í sjóinn á eftir konu sinni sem endurspeglar lýsingu Matthíasar í neðanmálsgreininni í *Þjóðólfi*: „Hafi þeir þá séð E. stökkva fyrir borð sem hafi hann ætlað að bjarga henni með sundi.“ En Eggert bjargar henni ekki með því að stökkva af skipinu heldur farast þau bæði: „frá unnar-jónum [skipskenning] hann stökk, / og niður í bráðan Breiðafjörð / í brúðar örmum sökk“ (Matthías Jochumsson 1980, 165). Þau drukkna í faðmlögum og þannig lætur Matthías þau ná saman í dauðanum. Það minnir á sagnadansa eins og Tristramkvæði sem endar á táknrænni sameiningu aðskilinna elskenda gegnum tré sem tengja grafir þeirra (*Íslenzk fornkvæði* I, 194, 197, 202, 206).

Eftir stendur mynd af manni sem er hetjulegur en sést ekki fyrir. Oflæti Eggerts og fyrirhyggjuleysi valda dauða hans og konunnar sem hann lætur sitja efst á offermdu skipi. Hann hlær og snýr út úr varnaðarorðum gamla mannsins í byrjun, segist ekki sigla skýin og að hann gleðji sig „við reiðan sjó.“ Matthías minnir á viðhorf upplýsingarmanna til hjátrúar þegar hann lætur Eggert segjast trúa á „Guð, en grýlur ei.“ Í orðunum felst einnig að hann líti á viðvaranir hins veðurglögga manns sem hverja aðra bábilju. Í „Barnafossi“ Gríms Thomsens langaði börnin „til að leika sér / í lundinum, þar sem fossinn er, / sigrað fékk ei boð né bann / þann breyskleikann.“ Kvæði Matthíasar um Eggert Ólafsson lýsir líka boði sem er hunsað og í báðum tilvikum leiðir það til dauða. Fossinn í kvæði Gríms er í senn náttúrufyrirbæri og heimkynni yfirnáttúrulegrar veru sem laðar börnin til sín. Í tilviki Eggerts, upplýsingarmannsins sem trúir á mátt sinn og megin, eru það veður og vindar sem valda dauðanum af því að hetjan ofmetnast og virðir ekki viðvaranir sem byggjast á næmri þekkingu á náttúrunni. Gamli þulurinn hafði séð þetta fyrir og kvatt Eggert „með þungri lund“: „Þú siglir ei þennan sjó í dag, / þú siglir á Guðs þíns fund“ (Matthías Jochumsson 1980, 164).

Matthías lýkur kvæðinu á svipaðan hátt og Bjarni Thorarensen gerði í „Kötlukvísl“, með því að láta ljóðmælandann ávarpa lesandann. Þar var lesandinn varaður við því að fara um Mýrdalssand, því að Katla „ætlar þér grand, / kaldhlátur dauða þar gellur í gjá.“ Ljóðmælandi Matthíasar (1980, 165) er mildari í ávarpi sínu og gefur einfaldlega til kynna að náttúran sjálf harmi það sem gerst hefur og geymi minningu um atburðinn:

Ef þrútið er loft, þungur sjór
og þoku drungað vor,
þú heyrir ennþá harma-ljóð,
sem hljóma frá kaldri Skor.

## 4. Lokaorð

Listrænar ballöður eru áhugaverð nýjung í bókmenntum 18. og 19. aldar. Einstakir höfundar taka sig þá til og yrkja kvæði í anda hefðbundinna sagnadansa. Þessi nýju kvæði eru í senn lík og ólík gamla kveðskapnum. Meðal sameiginlegra einkenna eru hröð framvinda; dramatík, samtöl og tilsvör; einfaldur stíll og setningagerð;

endurtekningar og formúlukennt orðalag; áhersla á hið örlagaþrungna og hið yfirnáttúrulega eða náttúrulega. Munurinn er aftur á móti sá að annars vegar eru frjálslegir bragarhættir og rím (assónans) en hins vegar meiri reglufesta í forminu; annars vegar alþýðuskemmtun og hins vegar listrænn eða lærður alþýðleiki; annars vegar munnleg hefð og hins vegar prentmenning; annars vegar þjóðkvæði og hins vegar höfundarverk; annars vegar hópdans með söng og hins vegar lestur og flutningur (upplestur, sönglög); og loks eru stef eða viðlög snar þáttur í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum en fátíð í listrænum ballöðum enda spretta þær ekki upp úr hópdansi og söng.

Íslensku kvæðin sem könnuð hafa verið í þessari grein fjalla um dauða og nánar tiltekið drukknun. Skáldin sem yrkja þau eru meðvituð um ballöðuhefðina og telja hana greinilega hæfa efninu. Matthías Jochumsson talar um „*ballade*-kveðskap“ Gríms Thomsens og Bjarni Thorarensen um „Ballade-Formid“ og „Romance-Tóninn“ sem eigi vel við „Erfiljód eptir Menn sem farast sviplega.“ Listrænar ballöður þeirra segja sögu og eru dramatískar. „Kötlukvísl“ Bjarna leggur að mörgu leyti línurnar í íslenskum kvæðum af þessu tagi með drungalegri náttúrulýsingu en hún þróast út í gotneskan hrylling með yfirnáttúrulegum öflum sem valda dauða. Að því leyti minnir kvæðið á listrænar ballöður þýskra skálda 18. og 19. aldar. Í „Barnafossi“ heillar yfirnáttúruleg vera börnin inn í fossinn og þar leggur Grímur út af íslensku og erlendu þjóðsagnaefni. Kvæðið kallast á við þýskan og norrænan kveðskap um slíkar náttúruvættir þó að þar sé líka ort um breyskleika barnanna sem minnir á ballöður enskra skálda. Kvæði Matthíasar um Eggert Ólafsson er sú listræna ballaða sem næst fer hefðbundnum sagnadönsum í formi, stíl og efnistökum. Þar felst ógnin í náttúrunni sjálfri og mannlegum breyskleika frekar en yfirnáttúrulegum öflum. Kvæðið sver sig því frekar í ætt við ensku ballöðuhefðina en þá þýsku.

Í hefðbundnum sagnadönsum eru dauði og ofbeldi algeng yrkisefni. Hið þekkta „Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós“ er í raun morðballaða (e. *murder ballad*): álfkona stingur Ólaf með eggvopni og veldur dauða hans (*Íslenzk fornkvæði* I, 1–11). Á sama hátt má segja að yfirnáttúruleg öfl – persónugerður dauði/meinvættur og gýgur í fossi – séu gerendur í kvæðum Bjarna og Gríms. Þau eru beinir valdar að dauða manna og barna í „Kötlukvísl“ og „Barnafossi.“ Hliðstæð minni eru þekkt í erlendum sagnadönsum og dauðaballöður af ýmsu tagi hafa notið vinsælda víða um heim (McIlvenna 2022, 228–84). Tónlistarfólk og söngvaskáld hafa samið lög og texta í þessum anda. Má þar nefna morðballöðurnar „Ástarsaga“ eftir Megas (*Loftmynd*, 1987) og „Henry Lee“ og „Where the Wild Roses Grow“ eftir Nick Cave (*Murder Ballads*, 1996; Newman 2017). Þessi verk eru til marks um hina merku arfleifð hefðbundinna sagnadansa sem halda áfram að höfða til fólks. Á 18. og 19. öld voru það evrópsk ljóðskáld sem hrifust af þessari alþýðlegu kvæðahefð og ortu listrænar ballöður í framhaldi af henni. Nú er svo komið að hefðbundnir sagnadansar og listrænar ballöður eru orðin lifandi þáttur í dægurmenningunni. Hugtakið ballaða hefur fengið margræða merkingu og er til dæmis notað um hæg ástarlög samtímans (e. *power ballad*; Metzer 2017, 134–79). Þannig hefur þessi alþýðuskemmtun ummyndast í aldanna rás og orðið farvegur fyrir tilfinningatjáningu sem spannar allan skalann frá ást yfir í dauða.

**Heimildir**


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# ÞEGAR FORNRITIN SKORUÐU HASARBLÖÐIN Á HÓLM: (OFUR)HETJUMYNDIR HALLDÓRS PÉTURSSONAR

Jón Karl Helgason*

> *Aldrei hefur verið til sú heimild um siðmenningu sem ekki vottar jafnframt um villimennsku. Og engu fremur en vitnisburðurinn er arfleiðslan sjálf, þegar heimildirnar færast frá manni til manns, laus við villimennsku.*
>
> (Walter Benjamin 2005, 30)

Í ársbyrjun 1967 sendi kennarafélag Austurbæjarskólans ályktun til fræðslustjórans í Reykjavík þar sem hörmuð voru mistök sem Ríkisútgáfa námsbóka hefði gert við val á myndum í endurútgáfu á kennslubókinni *Íslandssaga handa börnum* eftir Jónas Jónsson frá Hriflu. Þar væru „teikningar, sem kennarafélagið telur að ósæmilegt sé að birta í kennslubók fyrir börn á viðkvæmasta þroskaskeiði þeirra“ (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1967, 17). Var sérstaklega nefnd ein mynd sem sýndi Gunnar Hámundarson vega mann með atgeir sínum og búa sig undir að fleygja honum í Rangá. „Mun sambærileg mynd varla finnast í kennslubókum barna meðal annarra þjóða,“ staðhæfðu kennararnir og sögðust ekki ætla að afhenda nemendum sínum bókina að svo komnu máli (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1967, 17). Skoruðu þeir á fræðslustjórann að taka málið til athugunar og leita úrbóta.

Í kjölfarið birti *Morgunblaðið* frétt um ályktunina og hafði þar eftir einum kennaranum, Pétri Sumarliðasyni, að óánægjan snerti alls sextán myndir sem tengdust „á ýmsan hátt vígaferlum, hálfdauðum mönnum eða ýmsum áverkum“ (Morgunblaðið 1967, 2). Hann nefndi líka sautjándu myndina „af Sturlu Þórðarsyni, þá er hann situr veizlu hjá Magnúsi Hákonarsyni og Magnús mælir til Sturlu, „Vín skal til vinar drekka.“ Mynd þessa sagði Pétur mjög slæma með hliðsjón af því að bannaðar væru auglýsingar sem slíkar og skylt væri að hafa bindindisfræðslu í skólum“ (Morgunblaðið 1967, 2).

* Háskóli Íslands. Mig langar að þakka Bjarna Hinrikssyni, Unnari Erni og ritstjórum og ritrýnum þessa verks fyrir yfirlestur og góðar ábendingar meðan kaflinn var í smíðum.

Ekki vildi Pétur samt áfellast listamanninn, Halldór Pétursson, sem hefði að öðru leyti unnið verk sitt með prýði. Hér bæru yfirvöld skólamála alla ábyrgð.

Ályktun kennaranna í Austurbæjarskólanum var tekin alvarlega því í sömu frétt upplýsti Jón Emil Guðjónsson, framkvæmdastjóri Ríkisútgáfunnar, að vígið við Rangá hefði verið fjarlægt úr bók Jónasar og „önnur mynd sett inn í staðinn“ (Morgunblaðið 1967, 2). Jón sagði þó matsatriði hvað væri við hæfi og hvað ekki í þessum efnum og í sama streng tók ritstjóri verksins, Kristján J. Gunnarsson, í blaðagrein tveimur dögum síðar. Vísaði hann þar til laga sem kváðu á um að Ríkisútgáfan skyldi:

> leitast við að koma til móts við mismunandi óskir og sjónarmið að því er námsbækur varðar, m.a. með því að hafa um fleiri en eina bók að velja í hverri námsgrein. Í samræmi við þessa starfsreglu og með því að mikið af upplagi Íslandssögu J. J. var ennþá til vinnu í prentsmiðju, þótti útgáfustjórninni í Reykjavík rétt að verða við óskum þeirra kennara, sem mótmæltu umræddri mynd í bókinni, með því að fella hana út í þeim eintökum, sem þeir kæmu til með að nota. Í þau eintök bókarinnar var sett önnur mynd af sama atburði, þar sem eftir föngum er reynt að milda tjáningu myndarinnar á því sem hún á að lýsa (þ.e. bardaganum við Rangá, þar sem Gunnar á Hlíðarenda vegur mann með atgeirnum). Frá öðrum skólum en Austurbæjarskólanum hafa ekki borizt mótmæli af þessu tilefni, en að sjálfsögðu geta þeir sem þess kynnu að óska fengið þessa gerð bókarinnar. (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1967, 17)

Mynd 1: „… sumum kastaði hann af atgeirnum út á Rangá.“ Mynd Halldórs Pétursonar úr útgáfu Ríkisútgáfu námsbóka á *Íslands sögu* eftir Jónas Jónsson frá 1966.[1]

Kristján, sem var einnig formaður stjórnar Ríkisútgáfunnar og skólastjóri Langholtsskóla, andmælti því hins vegar að myndin af Gunnari væri einsdæmi og birti

[1] Myndir Halldórs Pétursonar birtast í þessum kafla með leyfi erfingja hans og mynd 2 (Halldór Pétursson 1929–1930) einnig með leyfi Þjóðminjasafns Íslands.

með grein sinni verk eftir norska og íslenska listamenn máli sínu til stuðnings, þeirra á meðal Andreas Bloch, Gunnlaug Scheving og Þorvald Skúlason. Þá benti hann á að í ályktun kennaranna fælist í raun gagnrýni á sjálfa námsskrána: „Spurningin er […] ekki eingöngu um það, hvernig myndskreyta eigi Íslendingasögurnar, heldur engu síður hitt, hvort ritskoða eigi þær, áður en þær eru lagðar fyrir börn og unglinga, eða jafnvel hvort hætta eigi að kenna þær í skólum okkar á þeim forsendum, að efni þeirra sé nemendum óhollt“ (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1967, 27).

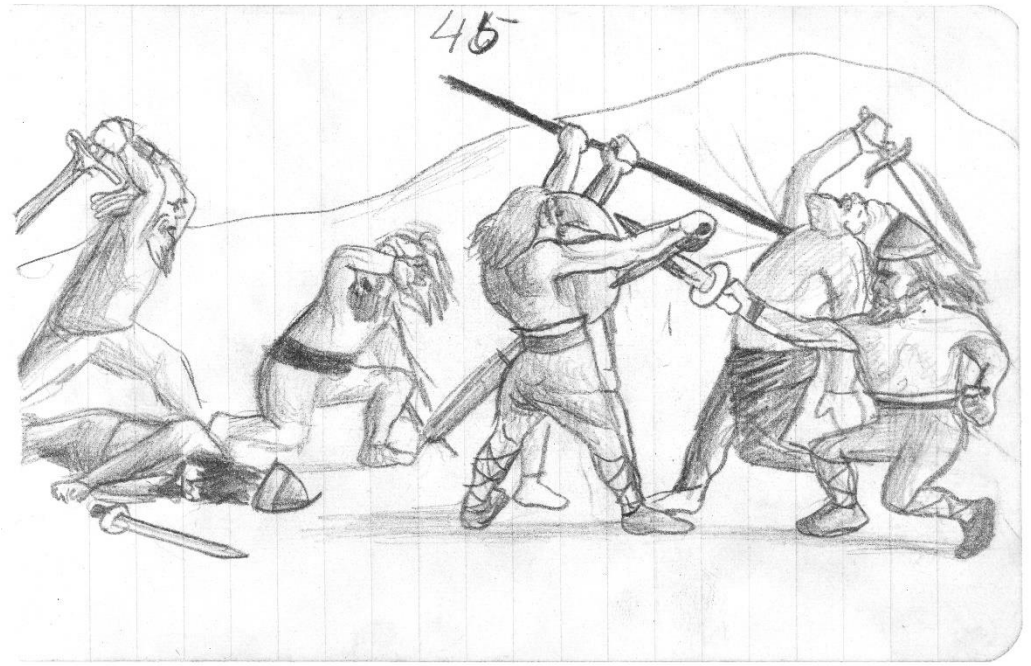
Á næstu vikum blönduðu fleiri sér í þessa umræðu og sýndist sitt hverjum. Enginn sá samt ástæðu til að rifja upp að Halldór Pétursson hafði áður sviðsett söguhetjur fornsagnanna án þess að fá skömm í hattinn. Samstarf þeirra Kristjáns á því sviði var ekki heldur nýtt af nálinni. Það hófst á árunum 1959 til 1961 með útgáfu tveggja myndasagna í *Lesbók barnanna*, vikulegu fylgiblaði *Morgunblaðsins* sem Kristján ritstýrði. Var önnur myndasagan byggð á *Njáls sögu* en hin á *Grettis sögu*. Eru þetta elstu íslensku myndasagnaseríurnar en hafa ekki notið þeirrar athygli sem vert er. Hér verður gerð bragarbót í því efni og fjallað um Halldór sem túlkanda íslenskra fornbókmennta, meðal annars í ljósi þversagnanna sem myndir hans í kennslubók Jónasar afhjúpa.

## „Þjóðleg listaverk í fremstu röð“

Halldór Pétursson fæddist árið 1916, ári eftir að *Íslandssaga handa börnum* kom upphaflega út, og hefur næsta örugglega kynnst ritinu sem nemandi. Fyrsti kennari Halldórs á sviði myndlistar var Guðmundur Thorsteinsson (Muggur) en Halldór var ekki nema sex eða sjö ára gamall þegar hann sótti tíma í teikningu hjá honum í einn vetur. „Satt að segja man ég nú óljóst eftir því námi, enda þótt kennarinn yrði mér ógleymanlegur“, sagði Halldór síðar í viðtali (Samtíðin 1949, 5). Athyglisvert er að Muggur var á þessum tíma að fást við frumstæða myndasagnagerð og hefur verið nefndur brautryðjandi á því sviði (Ólafur J. Engilbertsson 1992, 102). Á unglingsárum sótti Halldór einnig einkatíma í myndlist hjá Júlíönu Sveinsdóttur og gerði jafnframt sínar eigin tilraunir í gerð myndasagna (Indriði G. Þorsteinsson 1980, 12–14; Jón Karl Helgason 2024). Áhugi hans á fornritunum var líka vaknaður á þessum tíma því varðveist hafa eftir hann myndir af víkingaskipum og fornsagnahetjum, þeirra á meðal Gretti Ásmundarsyni (Halldór Pétursson 1927–1929; 1928–1929a).

Ljóst er að ofbeldið í sögunum höfðaði til hins unga listamanns. Ein æskuteikning hans sýnir Skarphéðin Njálsson búa sig undir að höggva Þráin Sigfússon með öxinni Rimmugýgi og önnur sýnir þá Skarphéðin og Þráin að vígi loknu (Halldór Pétursson 1925–1926;1928–1929b). Þetta er einn þeirra viðburða *Njálu* sem Jónas frá Hriflu endursegir í bók sinni: „Svellið var glerhált og rendi Skarphéðinn sér fótskriðu að Þráni svo hart sem fugl flýgi og klauf hann í herðar niður“ (Jónas Jónsson 1915, 61). Þá er til teikning eftir Halldór frá unglingsárum þar sem nokkrir vígamenn berjast til þrautar. Líkt og í hinni umdeildu mynd Halldórs frá 1967 er atgeir þar sökkt í brjóst eins fórnarlambsins (Halldór Pétursson 1929–1930). Hugsanlegt er að innblástur teikningarinnar sé lýsing Jónasar frá Hriflu á bardaga bræðranna Kolskeggs, Hjartar og Gunnars á Hlíðarenda við Starkað og flokk hans á Rangárbökkum: „Gunnar hafði sverð

í annari hendi en atgeirinn í hinni, og féllu menn fyrir honum unnvörpum; sumum kastaði hann af atgeirnum út á Rangá“ (Jónas Jónsson 1915, 60). Annar áhrifavaldur Halldórs kann að vera Andreas Bloch sem vann myndlýsingar fyrir fornsagnaúrval Nordahls Rolfsen, *Vore fædres liv*, sem út kom í Noregi 1898. Í sviðsetningum Blochs eru persónur fornsagnanna sveipaðar hetjuljóma, „fríðar, íklæddar pelli og purpura og vel vopnum búnar,“ svo vitnað sé til skrifa Aðalsteins Ingólfssonar (2002, 163). En þótt fasið sé göfugmannlegt forðaðist Bloch ekki ofbeldið í sögunum. Dró hann bæði upp mynd af því þegar Skarphéðinn heggur Þráin á ísnum og þegar Gunnar vegur óvin sinn upp með atgeirnum. Valdar myndir Blochs úr útgáfu Rolfsens voru prentaðar á póstkort hér á landi á öðrum og þriðja áratugnum og þekktu margir til þeirra (Guðmundur Þorsteinsson 1954, 136).




Mynd 2: „Víkingabardagi.“ Æskumynd Halldórs Péturssonar af Gunnari á Hlíðarenda og bræðrum hans, líklega frá 1929 eða 1930.

Að loknu stúdentsprófi árið 1935 stundaði Halldór nám í auglýsingateiknun við Kunsthåndværkerskolen í Kaupmannahöfn um þriggja ára skeið. Í kjölfarið hóf hann að starfa með systur sinni, Ágústu Pétursdóttur, sem útskrifast hafði skömmu fyrr úr sama skóla og stofnað auglýsingastofu í Reykjavík. Meðal verkefna þeirra var hönnun vörumerkja, umbúða, bóka og bókakápa (Indriði G. Þorsteinsson 1980, 21). Í ársbyrjun 1942 hélt Halldór síðan í framhaldsnám í myndlist til Bandaríkjanna, fyrst til Minneapolis og síðan New York. Var hann einn margra íslenskra listamanna sem nam vestanhafs á þessu tímabili en meðal annarra í hópnum voru Nína Tryggvadóttir, Louisa Matthíasdóttir og Drífa Viðar. Hann hreifst þó ekki af þeim módernísku stefnum sem

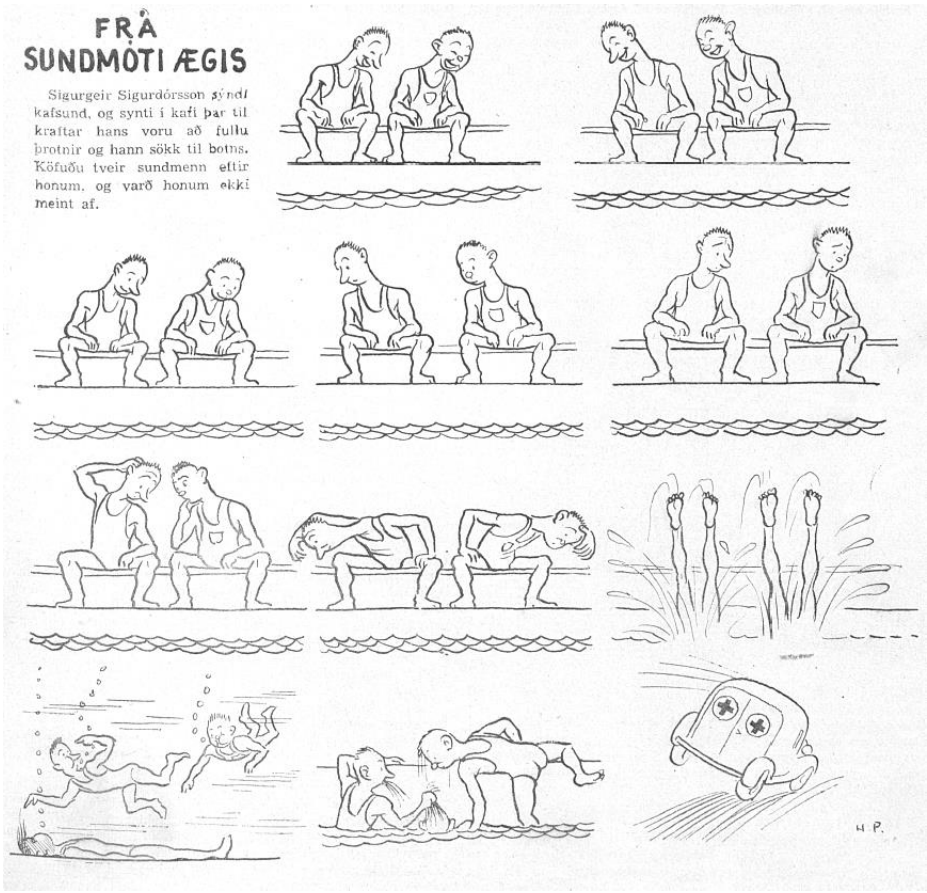
þá voru að ryðja sér til rúms heldur lagði hann höfuðáherslu á að rækta hæfileika sína sem teiknari (*Samtíðin* 1949, 6).[2] Á stríðsárunum var jafnframt mikil gróska í útgáfu bandarískra myndasagna, bæði í dagblöðum og sérstökum „hasarblöðum." Ofurhetjur á borð við Superman, Batman og Captain America nutu mikilla vinsælda en einnig má frá þessum tíma finna myndasögur þar sem norræn goð og víkingar skjóta upp kolli (Jón Karl Helgason 2014; 2020). Líklegt er að Halldór hafi haft veður af þessari þróun enda var New York miðstöð myndasagnaútgáfunnar.

Halldór sneri heim úr náminu um mitt ár 1945 og fór að starfa sjálfstætt, einkum við myndlýsingar í blöðum, tímaritum og bókum. Varð hann meðal annars kunnur fyrir skopmyndir sínar í háðsádeiluritinu *Speglinum*. Einn stofnandi og aðalteiknari þess var Tryggvi Magnússon og má þegar á þriðja áratugnum finna myndaraðir í *Speglinum* eftir hann sem eðlilegt er að flokka sem myndasögur (Jón Karl Helgason 2024, 92–98). Ein sú elsta, sem kallast „Kattafarganið", lýsir í sex textalausum teikningum tilraunum lögreglumanns til að handsama horaðan kött (Tryggvi Magnússon 1930). Halldór var sporgöngumaður Tryggva í þessu efni. Á árunum 1947 til 1948 birti hann í flestum tölublöðum *Spegilsins*, sem út komu mánaðarlega, eina myndasögu sem samanstóð af sex til tólf myndum. Elsta myndasagan er skopleg sviðsetning á stuttum texta úr blaðafrétt af þátttakanda í sundmóti sem bjargað er frá drukknun á elleftu stundu (Halldór Pétursson 1947). Finna má fleiri sögur af líku tagi eftir Halldór í tímaritinu næstu ár á eftir en þetta efni staðfestir áhuga og skilning hans á myndasögunni sem tjáningarmiðli. Á sama tíma tók hann að sér að myndlýsa tvær bækur sem tengdust íslenskum fornritum en þar var um að ræða eldfiman efnivið sem hafði á undangengnum árum vakið harðvítugar deilur og leitt til málaferla.

Deilurnar hófust haustið 1941 þegar spurðist að skáldið Halldór Laxness og bókaútgefandinn Ragnar Jónsson (í Smára) ætluðu að gefa *Laxdælu* út í styttri gerð, að mestu án ættartalna og með nútímastafsetningu. Samþykkti Alþingi lög af þessu tilefni sem skylduðu útgefendur til að sækja um leyfi hjá kennslumálaráðuneytinu til að gefa út íslensk rit sem samin væru fyrir aldamótin 1400. *Laxdæla* kom út á vegum Ragnars og Laxness áður en lögin voru afgreidd á þingi og í kjölfarið gáfu þeir *Hrafnkötlu* út í trássi við lögin. Fór svo að þeir, ásamt Stefáni Ögmundssyni prentara, voru dæmdir í undirrétti fyrir brot á umræddum lögum. Áfrýjuðu þeir málinu til Hæstaréttar og fengu dómnum hnekkt á þeirri forsendu að lögin stönguðust á við ákvæði stjórnarskrár um prentfrelsi. Jafnframt fengu þeir leyfi frá sitjandi kennslumálaráðherra (fyrrum tengdaföður Laxness) til að gefa *Brennunjálssögu* út. Kom hún út í stóru broti haustið 1945 með myndum eftir Gunnlaug Scheving, Þorvald Skúlason og Snorra Arinbjarnar.

[2] Meðal kennara Halldórs ytra voru Robert Brackman, George Bridgman, Jon Corbino og Harry Sternberg. Í áðurnefndu viðtali sagði Halldór að Bridgman væri „talinn einn snjallasti „anatomy"-teiknari vestan hafs" og að Corbino væri „mjög frægur fyrir hestamyndir sínar." Í sama viðtali segir að Halldór sé „raunsæismaður í verkum sínum og náttúrudýrkandi að vissu marki. Hann er að sjálfsögðu hleypidómalaus gagnvart ólíkustu stefnum í málaralist og segist hafa gaman af vel gerðum myndum, gersamlega án tillits til, hvaða -isma höfundar þeirra fylgi. Hann segir, að nú sé farið að hafa strangara eftirlit en áður með því vestanhafs, hverjir fái að senda myndir á opinberar málverkasýningar og ástæðan sé sú, að talið sé, að ýmsir fúskarar og stælingamenn hafi vaðið þar helzt til mikið uppi að undanförnu" (*Samtíðin* 1949, 6–7).

Ári fyrr hafði Ragnar prentað áþekka viðhafnarútgáfu *Heimskringlu* með myndum norskra listamanna og ári síðar gaf hann út *Grettis sögu* með sama hætti, undir ritstjórn Laxness og með myndum eftir Gunnlaug og Þorvald (sjá nánar Jón Karl Helgason 1998, 119–37; 2002).


FRÁ
SUNDMÓTI ÆGIS
Sigurgeir Sigurdórsson synti kafsund, og synti í kafi þar til kraftar hans voru að fullu þrotnir og hann sökk til botns. Köfuðu tveir sundmenn eftir honum, og varð honum ekki meint af.
H. P.

Mynd 3: „Frá sundmóti Ægis.“ Myndasaga Halldórs Péturssonar úr *Speglinum* frá 1947.

Í umræðum á Alþingi um málið skiptist þingheimur í íhaldsmenn, sem töldu fornritin vera dýrgripi sem ekki mætti gera neinar verulegar breytingar á, og umbyltingarmenn sem töldu brýnt að laga sögurnar að nýjum kynslóðum og miðlum. Í hópi þeirra fyrrnefndu var Jónas frá Hriflu, sem hafði þó sjálfur túlkað efni fornsagnanna frjálslega handa börnum í *Íslandssögu* sinni þrjátíu árum fyrr. Meðal þeirra síðarnefndu var Sigfús Sigurhjartarson sem hvatti sérstaklega til þess í þingræðu að Ríkisútgáfa námsbóka léti prenta handa 8 til 9 ára börnum „fallegar útgáfur aðalkaflanna úr Laxdælu, Njálu, Eglu og fleiri snilldarrita okkar, prýddar og litaðar fögrum myndum. Þá mun það sannast, að börn okkar unna Íslendingasögunum, lesa þær og skilja“ (Alþingi 1946, 214). Inn í málið blönduðust líka átök um þjóðlega og

óþjóðlega myndlist en þar skipaði Jónas frá Hriflu sér einnig í flokk íhaldsmanna (Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson 1994; Ólafur Rastrick og Benedikt Hjartarson 2019). Voru Þorvaldur og Gunnlaugur í hópi þeirra róttæku myndlistarmanna sem Jónasi var í nöp við og fólst meðvituð ögrun af hálfu Ragnars í því að fá þá til liðs við sig (Jón Karl Helgason 1998, 130). Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson hefur bent á að myndir Gunnlaugs í *Brennunjálssögu* séu undir áhrifum af teikningum Gerhards Munthe og Halfdans Egedius í áðurnefndri útgáfu Ragnars á *Heimskringlu*. Þær höfðu upphaflega birst í Noregi árið 1899 og vakið „töluverða athygli og jafnvel deilur þar í landi, ekki síst fyrir hráar og umbúðalausar lýsingar listamannanna á ofbeldi sagnanna. Til dæmis blöskraði ýmsum teikningar þeirra af Noregskonungum og öðru fyrirfólki í andarslitunum“ (Aðalsteinn Ingólfsson 2002, 166).

Eitt af veigameiri verkefnum Halldórs Péturssonar eftir heimkomuna frá New York voru myndlýsingar í *Faxa*, bók um íslenska hestinn sem Broddi Jóhannesson sendi frá sér árið 1947. Þar eru meðal annars sviðsettar senur úr íslenskum bókmenntum þar sem þarfasti þjónninn kemur við sögu. Hér nýttist vel sú þjálfun sem Halldór hafði fengið í náminu ytra en einnig fornsagnaáhuginn því meðal viðfangsefna hans í bókinni eru hestavíg sem lýst er í 58. kafla *Njáls sögu* og hin fræga sena úr 75. kafla þegar hestur Gunnars á Hlíðarenda drepur niður fæti með þeim afleiðingum að hetjan ákveður að snúa aftur heim í stað þess að fylgja bróður sínum í útlegð (Broddi Jóhannesson 1947, 160–61 og 166–67). Halldór fékk sérstakt hrós fyrir aðild sína að verkinu í ritdómi eftir Jóhann Frímann (1947, 18), kennara við Gagnfræðaskóla Akureyrar. Kallaði hann myndirnar í *Faxa* „þjóðleg listaverk í allra fremstu röð á sínu sviði“ og hvatti lesendur til að bera þær „saman við pírumpár og klessuverk hinna örgu „listamanna“, sem apa stöðugt erlenda tízkulist, merglausa, óhrjálega og innihaldslausa „isma“ og „ista“.“ Þau orð vísa í deilurnar um óþjóðlega list sem áður voru nefndar.

Í kjölfarið vann Halldór myndlýsingar fyrir úrval texta úr Íslendingasögum sem Marinó L. Stefánsson, kennari við Laugarnesskóla, hafði valið, stytt og endursagt fyrir börn. Verkið, sem bar titilinn *Kappar*, kom út í tveimur bindum á árunum 1949 og 1950 og hafði meðal annars að geyma efni úr *Grettis sögu*, *Gunnlaugs sögu*, *Harðar sögu*, *Laxdæla sögu* og *Gísla sögu*. Í formála fyrra bindis sagði Marinó að hvötin að baki útgáfunni væri minnkandi lestur yngra fólks á fornsögunum sem hann taldi stafa af frásagnarhætti þeirra og fyrndum orðaforða. Kvaðst hann vonast til „að þeim ungu verði efnið aðgengilegra“ í sinni útgáfu en sagði jafnframt „að barn sem les þessa þætti, kannast við sögurnar og langar fremur til að lesa þær sjálfar, þegar þær verða á vegi þess síðar, eða um þær rætt í skólum, sem það sækir“ (Marinó L. Stefánsson 1949, 3). Hann ítrekaði þessa afstöðu í formálsorðum seinna bindis og bætti við að ef „góðar myndir af atburðunum“ fylgdu með yrði „ánægjan við lesturinn ennþá meiri“ (Marinó L. Stefánsson 1950, 5). Halldór gerði fjörutíu fremur raunsæjar teikningar fyrir þessi tvö bindi, í stíl upphöfnu myndarinnar af Gunnari á Hlíðarenda í *Faxa*. Hann valdi sér fjölbreytileg viðfangsefni úr textunum, allt frá elskulegu samtali ambáttarinnar Melkorku við son sinn Ólaf á lækjarbakka til átakanlegrar glímu Grettis við Glám undir fullu tungli.

Ein ofbeldisfyllsta sviðsetningin sýnir Helga Harðbeinsson leggja til Bolla Þorleikssonar með spjóti „í gegnum skjöldinn og hann sjálfan“ (Marinó L. Stefánsson 1950, 51).

Mynd 4: „… í gegnum skjöldinn og hann sjálfan.“ Mynd Halldórs Péturssonar af vígi Bolla Þorleikssonar í síðara bindinu af *Köppum* frá 1950.

En þarna má einnig finna skoplegri myndir sem minna fremur á þau tilþrif sem Halldór hafði sýnt í *Speglinum*, ekki síst í þætti af Hreiðari heimska sem er fremur álappalegur útlits.

Þess má geta að sama ár og fyrra bindi *Kappa* kom út sendi Finnbogi Guðmundsson frá sér hliðstætt verk fyrir yngri lesendur undir titlinum *Þá riðu hetjur um héruð*. Þar birti hann valda kafla úr nokkrum fornsögum, þeirra á meðal *Egils sögu*, *Gunnlaugs sögu*, *Gísla sögu* og *Njáls sögu*, ásamt viðeigandi myndum Andreas Bloch úr *Vore fædres liv*. Í formála segist Finnbogi hafa beinlínis valið textana „með hliðsjón af myndunum, en reynt að tengja hina einstöku kafla saman með stuttum efnisþræði. Þyki hann ekki nógur, er alltaf hægt að snúa sér til sagnanna sjálfra“ (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1949, 6). Líkt og í tilviki Marinós er hér reynt að sætta viðhorf íhaldsmanna og umbyltingarmanna, þ.e. að sníða fornritin að smekk nýrra kynslóða en telja lesendum trú um að endurritunin þjóni í raun frumtextanum. Hjá Finnboga birtist þessi þversögn skýrt í lokorðum formálans,

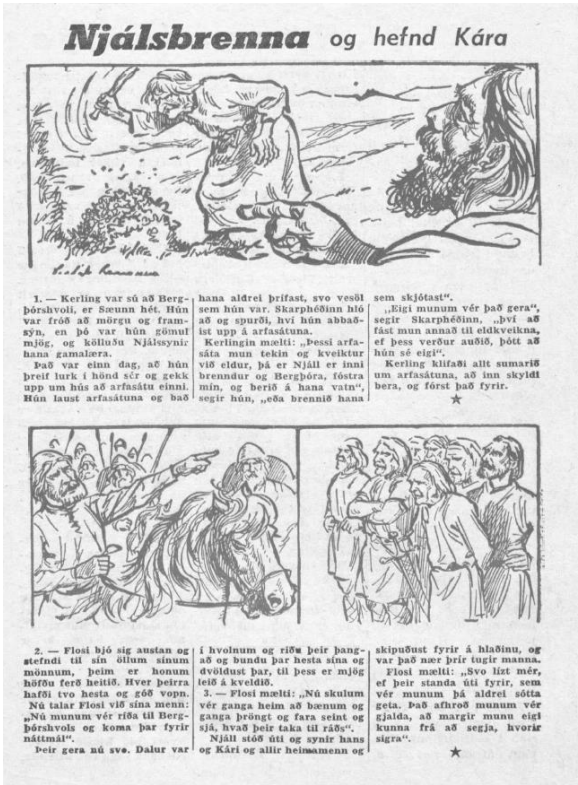
> Þótt bók þessi sé ekki sízt ætluð yngstu lesendum Íslendinga sagna, fannst mér ekki ástæða til að breyta *ok* í *og* og *þat* í *það* fyrir þær sakir. Mér hafa alltaf fundizt sögurnar eiga að vera á sérstakri stafsetningu. Við það tapast ekki neitt, en vinnst einhver blær, sem hollt er að hafa á sögum þessum. Er það loks von mín, að bókin megi í senn verða til að rifja upp sögurnar fyrir þeim, sem eldri eru, og koma hinum yngri á bragðið. (Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1949, 6)

## „Og myndirnar segja sex“

Áður en athyglin beinist að myndasögunum tveimur sem Halldór og Kristján unnu fyrir *Lesbók barnanna* er gagnlegt að rifja upp að bandarísku hasarblöðin sem bárust hingað til lands á árum síðari heimsstyrjaldar fengu fljótt slæmt orð á sig. Meðal þeirra sem börðust gegn útbreiðslu þeirra var Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson blaðamaður sem skrifaði vinsælan dálk í *Alþýðublaðið* undir dulnefninu Hannes á Horninu. Haustið 1946 gerði hann athugasemd við að Kaupfélag Reykjavíkur og nágrennis skyldi bjóða til sölu amerísk hasarblöð sem hann sagðist hafa gluggað í sér til fróðleiks. „Og myndirnar segja sex“, var niðurstaða Vilhjálms af þeirri rannsókn. „Þarna stingur svakalegt mannkvikindi annað mannkvikindi á hol svo að rautt blóðið fossar yfir hálfa síðuna. Hérna stendur hnífur í hálsi manns upp að hjöltum, en sá sem á honum heldur glennir upp ginið svo að glittir í hvítgular skakkar rándýrstennurnar.“ Lauk greininni á kröfu um „að hætt yrði að selja börnum þessi óþverrablöð“ (Vilhjálmur S. Vilhjálmsson 1946). Þessi orð voru ítrekuð í ómerktri grein sem birtist skömmu síðar í ársriti Stéttarfélags barnakennara í Reykjavík. „Síðustu árin hafa bóksalar flutt inn frá Ameríku svo nefnd Hasarblöð eða Bófablöð og selt hér, vafalaust með góðum hagnaði. Engir líta við þessum bókmenntum, nema börn, einkum drengir, og efni þeirra má með fullum rétti líkja við eitur“, sagði þar meðal annars (*Foreldrablaðið* 1946). Fór svo að fulltrúafundur kaupfélagsins skoraði „á félagsstjórn að hætta innflutningi „hasarblaða“, en verja innflutningsleyfum til kaupa á bókum menningarlegs eðlis“ (*Alþýðublaðið* 1947).

Líkt og Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir (2018, 115) hefur bent á var þessi umræða angi af víðtækari áhyggjum af spillandi áhrifum bandarískrar afþreyingarmenningar á evrópsk ungmenni, „Á Norðurlöndum var sérstaklega til þess tekið að einföld og óraunsæ framsetning hasarblaðanna á baráttu góðs og ills gæti skekkt sýn lesendanna á heiminn og gengi gegn norrænum gildum um lýðræði, jafnrétti og friðsamlegar lausnir.“ Þessi viðhorf voru enn uppi á teningnum áratug síðar þegar ráðist var í útgáfu þýddra bandarískra myndasögublaða undir titlinum „Sígildar sögur með myndum.“ Um var að ræða aðlaganir á ýmsum þekktum verkum heimsbókmenntanna, þeirra á meðal voru *Illíonskviða*, *Hamlet, Gulleyjan* og *Moby Dick*. Á árunum 1956 til 1957 komu út í þessari röð 23 blöð sem Guðmundur Karlsson þýddi og annaðist útgáfu á fyrir hönd alþjóðlega forlagsins Classics International. Þegar verkefnið var kynnt íslenskum blaðamönnum var lögð áhersla á að flestar þær myndasögur sem notið hefðu vinsælda meðal íslenskra barna og unglinga á undangengnum árum væru mannskemmandi. „Guðmundur Karlsson kvaðst vona, að með þessari útgáfu, hefði verið farið inn á rétta braut í myndasagnaútgáfu hér á landi. En hvers konar erlent ,,hasar“- blaðarusl hefur haslað

sér völl. — Aðeins góð íslenzk útgáfa á myndasögum, sem börn og unglingar hafa gaman af og lærdómsríkt er fyrir þau að lesa, getur rutt hinu lélega úr vegi“ (*Morgunblaðið* 1956). En ekki voru allir ginkeyptir fyrir þessari útgáfu. Drífa Viðar (1957, 46) benti á að fjarska lítill munur væri á hinum „sígildu sögum“ og hasarblöðunum illræmdu: „Ég fletti einu blaði, galopin augu, glennt hönd, brugðin sverð, sprenging, óttaslegin andlit, menn á leyniráðstefnu, hræðileg andlit sem fylgja manni í draumi. Menn að slá aðra í rot eða stinga með spjóti […], satt að segja virðast þessar beztu sögur heims gantalega hræðilegar.“ Freistandi er að setja myndasögurnar í *Lesbók barnanna* í þetta samhengi, sem þversagnakennda tilraun til að framleiða mótefni gegn eitrandi áhrifum hasarblaðanna á íslenskan æskulýð. Fyrri sagan, „Njálsbrenna og hefnd Kára“, birtist í blaðinu frá 8. febrúar 1959 til 17. febrúar 1960 en sú síðari, sem nefndist einfaldlega „Grettis saga“, frá 16. mars 1960 til 24. desember 1961. Ein síða birtist í viku hverri en langt hlé varð á útgáfunni yfir sumartímann meðan útgáfa *Lesbókar barnanna* lá niðri (frá lokum maí fram í október eða nóvember). Kristján annaðist ritstjórn textans, sem var tekinn orðréttur upp úr viðkomandi sögum en mikið styttur og bútaður niður í númeraða þætti sem áttu við eina mynd hver. Halldór teiknaði að jafnaði fjórar myndir fyrir hverja síðu og voru þær settar upp sem tvær „strípur“ með textanum neðan við. Fyrri sagan telur 30 síður (114 þætti/myndir) og sú síðari 50 síður (200 þætti/myndir).


Njálsbrenna og hefnd Kára
1. — Kerling var sú að Bergþórshvoli, er Sæunn hét. Hún var fróð að morgu og framsýn, en þó var hún gömul mjög, og köllusu Njálssynir hana gamalæra.
Það var einn dag, að hún þreif lurk í hönd sér og gekk upp um hús að arfasátu einni. Hún laust arfasátuna og bað hana aldrei þrífast, svo vesöl sem hún var. Skarphéðinn hló að og spurði, hví hún abbaðist upp á arfasátuna.
Kerlingin mælti: „Þessi arfasáta mun tekin og kveiktur við eldur, þá er Njáll er inni brenndur og Bergþóra, fóstra mín, og berið á hana vatn“, segir hún, „eða brennið hana sem skjótast“.
„Eigi munum vér það gera“, segir Skarphéðinn, „því að fást mun annað til eldkveikna, ef þess verður auðið, þótt að hún sé eigi“.
Kerling klifaði allt sumarið um arfasátuna, að inn skyldi bera, og fórst það fyrir.
★
2. — Flosi bjó sig austan og stefndi til sín öllum sínum mönnum, þeim er honum höfðu ferð heitið. Hver þeirra hafði tvo hesta og góð vopn.
Nú talar Flosi við sína menn: „Nú munum vér ríða til Bergþórshvols og koma þar fyrir náttmál“.
Þeir gera nú svo. Dalur var í hvolnum og riðu þeir þangað og bundu þar hesta sína og dvöldust þar, til þess er mjög leið á kveldið.
3. — Flosi mælti: „Nú skulum vér ganga heim að bænum og ganga þröngt og fara seint og sjá, hvað þeir taka til ráðs“.
Njáll stóð úti og synir hans og Kári og allir heimamenn og skipuðust fyrir á hlaðinu, og var það nær þrír tugir manna.
Flosi mælti: „Svo lízt mér, ef þeir standa úti fyrir, sem vér munum þá aldrei sóttа geta. Það afhroð munum vér gjalda, að margir munu eigi kunna frá að segja, hvorir sigra“.
★

Mynd 5. „Njálsbrenna og hefnd Kára.“ Upphafssíða myndasögu Kristjáns J. Gunnarssonar og Halldórs Péturssonar í *Lesbók barnanna* 8. febrúar 1959.

GRETTISSAGA
1.
2.
1) Ásmundur hærulangur setti bú að Bjargi miklið og reisulegt. Son áttu þau Ásdís, er Grettir var kallaður.
Grettir óx upp að Bjargi, þar til hann var tíu vetra gamall. Ásmundur bað hann starfa nokkuð. Grettir sagði sér það eigi mundu vera vel hent og spurði þó að, hvað hann skyldi gera.
Ásmundur svarar: „Þú skalt gæta heimagása minna".
Grettir svarar og mælti: „Lítið verk og löðurmannlegt".
2) Síðan tók Grettir við heimgásunum. Þær voru fimm tugir og með kjúklingar marg ir. Eigi leið langt, áður honum þóttu þær heldur bágrækar.
Nokkru síðar fundu förumenn kjúklinga dauða úti og heimagæsir vængbrotnar. —
„Fást mun þér verk annað", sagði Ásmundur.
„Fleira veit sá fleira reynir", sagði Grettir, „eða hvað skal ég nú gera?"
Ásmundur svarar: „Þú skalt strjúka bak mitt við eld, sem ég læt þafnan gera".
3.
4.
3) Fór nú svo fram um hríð, að Grettir heldur þessum starfa.
Það var eitt kvöld, að Grettir skyldi hrífa bak Ásmundar, að karl mælti: „Nú muntu verða af þér að draga slenið, mannskræfan".
Grettir segir: „Illt er að eggja óbilgjarnan".
Ásmundur mælti: „Aldrei er dugur í þér".
Grettir sér nú, hvar stóðu ullarkambar í setinu, tekur upp kambinn og lætur ganga ofan eftir bak Ásmundar. Hann hljóp upp og varð óður við og vildi ljósta Grett
4) Nokkurri stundu síðar talaði Ásmundur til, að Grettir skyldi geyma hrossa hans. Grettir kvað sér það betur þykja en bakeldagerðin.
„Þá skaltu svo að fara", sagði Ásmundur, „sem ég býð þér. Hryssu á ég bleikálótta, er ég kalla Kengálu. Hún er svo vís um veðráttu og vatnagang, að það mun aldrei bresta, að þá mun hríð eftir koma, ef hún vill ei á jörð ganga.
Grettir svarar: „Þetta er kalt verk og karlmannlegt.

Mynd 6. „Grettissaga." Upphafssíða myndasögu Kristjáns J. Gunnarssonar og Halldórs Péturssonar í *Lesbók barnanna* 16. mars 1960.

Samspil texta og mynda er hliðstætt samspili miðlanna tveggja í *Köppum*; munurinn felst í takmarkaðri lengd textana í myndasögunni, auknum fjölda mynda og virkara innbyrðis samspili. Deila má um hvort þetta séu „myndskreyttar" frásagnir eða nútímalegar myndasögur en í raun vega verkin salt þar á milli, rétt eins og margar þýddar myndasögur sem þá þegar höfðu birst hér á landi.[3]

[3] Ég vil gera greinarmun á textum í skopmyndum og myndasögum annars vegar eftir því hvort þeir birtast A) utan við myndina eða B) eru felldir inn í myndina (t.d. í talblöðru) og hins vegar eftir því hvort textarnir eru 1) lýsingar utanaðkomandi sögumanns eða 2) tal og hugsanir persóna (sjá Jón Karl Helgason 2024, 82–83). „Njálsbrenna og hefnd Kára" og „Grettissaga" falla í flokka A1 og A2 og sama máli gegnir um umtalsverðan hluta þeirra þýddu myndasagna sem höfðu birst hér á landi fram til 1959. Má þar nefna sögur um Halla hrúku/hrauk, Ljósálfinn litla/Dísu ljósálf og Galdrakarlinn góða sem prentaðar voru á þriðja og fjórða áratugnum, fyrst sem framhaldsefni í íslenskum blöðum eða tímaritum og síðar í bókarformi (sjá nánar, Sveppageifinn 2022). Sumar vinsælar þýddar myndasögur sem falla

Eins og við er að búast voru teikningar Halldórs í *Lesbók barnanna* einfaldari en listilega skyggðu myndlýsingarnar í *Köppum.* Mikill meirihluti myndanna í myndasögunum tveimur eru línuteikningar af persónum sem ræða saman, ríða milli staða, fást við bústörf eða bregða brandi. Sjónarhornið er áþekkt frá einni mynd til annarrar og beinist gjarnan að efri hluta líkama í augnhæð. Stundum birtast einnig andlit í nærmynd eða einn eða fleiri einstaklingar sjást í víðmynd, með hús eða landslag í bakgrunni. Fremur sjaldgæft er að sköpuð sé dýpt með því að blanda saman forgrunni og bakgrunni. Flestar fullorðnar persónur eru áþekkar í útliti og klæðaburður þeirra svipaður (bolur, buxur og hnésíður kyrtill, ýmist með stuttum eða löngum ermum, belti um mittið, lágir skór sem eru reimaðir upp eftir kálfum). Halldór reynir þó oftast að gefa lykilpersónum sérkenni sem falist geta í óvenjulegri hárgreiðslu eða höfuðbúnaði (t.d. hárbandi eða hjálmi) og einkennum á fatnaði (sniði kyrtils eða skikkju). Sterkustu persónueinkennin í eldri sögunni hafa Njáll, sem er bæði skegglaus og með há kollvik, og Björn úr Mörk sem er fremur skoplegur útlits. Markverðustu sjónrænu tilþrifin sýnir Halldór í myndum sem lýsa draumi Flosi en hann birtist þar í einskonar skýi (Kristján J. Gunnarsson og Halldór Pétursson 1959a, 15).

Áhugavert er að Kristján mildar almennt ekki ofbeldislýsingar sagnanna sjálfra. Aftur á móti er misjafnt hvort og hvernig Halldór bregst við slíkum lýsingum. Almennt forðast hann „hráar og umbúðarlausar“ sviðsetningar á ofbeldinu. Oft lætur hann nægja að sýna persónur þegar þær gera sig líklega til að láta högg ríða af en það eru samt dæmi um að persónur séu stungnar á hol. Þetta á við um mynd Halldórs af því þegar Þórhallur Ásgrímsson vegur Grím hinn rauða en þar er textinn svohljóðandi: „jafnskjótt sem þeir fundust, lagði Þórhallur til hans spjótinu, og kom í skjöldinn, og klofnaði hann í sundur, en spjótið hljóp í gegnum hann, svo að oddurinn kom út á milli herðanna. Þórhallur kastaði honum dauðum af spjótinu“ (Kristján J. Gunnarsson og Halldór Pétursson 1959b, 15). Teikningin minnir á mynd Halldórs af því þegar Helgi vegur Bolla í *Köppum*. Áþekkar myndir má finna í „Grettissögu“ (Kristján J. Gunnarsson og Halldór Pétursson 1960, 15; 1961, 15). En það eru líka ýmis dæmi um að Halldór sniðgangi óhugnað textans, til að mynda með því að beina athygli að gerandanum fremur en þolandanum.

Líkt og í áðurnefndum bókum Marinós og Finnboga er gefið í skyn í *Lesbók barnanna* að hlutverk myndasagnanna tveggja sé að leiða yngri lesendur á vit fornsagnanna sjálfra. Í kynningu sem birtist samhliða fyrstu síðunni af „Njálsbrennu og hefnd Kára“ vorið 1959 segir meðal annars:

> Lesbókin vill stuðla að því að börn og unglingar LESI Íslendingasögurnar. Myndasagan er vinsælt lesefni og þess vegna viljum við nota hana til að kynna valda kafla úr sögunum. En áherzlu verður að leggja á það, að myndirnar og textinn, sem þeim fylgir, segir alls ekki alla söguna. Þess vegna er nauðsynlegt, að þið lesið söguna sjálfa um leið og þið fylgist með myndasögunni. Þá munið þið skilja hvort tveggja betur og efnið festast ykkur í minni. (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1959, 16)

undir flokka A1 og A2 voru aðlaganir skáldsagna, til dæmis sögurnar af „Tarzan apabróður“ sem hófu göngu sína sem framhaldsefni í *Vísi* vorið 1942 en komu líka út á bók hér á landi sama ár.

Njálsbrenna og hefnd Kára
51.
52.
51. — Fer hann nú, þar til er hann kemur til fimmtardómsins. Þar mætti hann Grími hinum rauða, frænda Flosa, og jafnskjótt sem þeir fundust, lagði Þórhallur til hans spjótinu, og kom í skjöldinn, og klofnaði hann í sundur, en spjótið hljóp í gegn um hann, svo að oddurinn kom út á milli herðanna. Þórhallur kastaði honum dauðum af spjótinu.
52. — Kári Sölmundarson gat séð þetta og mælti við Ásgrím: „Hér er kominn Þórhallur, sonur þinn, og hefir þegar vegið víg, og er þetta skömm mikil, ef hann einn skal hug til hafa að hefna brennunnar".
„Það skal og eigi vera", segir Ásgrímur, „og snúum vér nú að þeim".
Var þá kall mikið um allan herinn, og síðan var æpt heróp.
Þeir Flosi snerust þá við, og eggjuðust nú fast hvorir tveggja.

Mynd 7. „svo að oddurinn kom út á milli herðanna." Mynd Halldórs Péturssonar af vígi Gríms hins rauða úr „Njálsbrennu og hefnd Kára" í *Lesbók barnanna* 10. maí 1959.

Áþekkar leiðbeiningar fylgdu „Grettissögu" úr hlaði: „Jafnóðum og myndasagan birtist ættuð þið að lesa Grettis sögu sjálfa, þar er öll sagan sögð, en með myndunum er aðeins úrdráttur. Aftur á móti munu myndirnar gera ykkur auðveldara að skilja og meta söguna en ella" (Kristján J. Gunnarsson 1960, 16). Opinberlega er hugmyndin að taka form myndasögunnar í þjónustu fornsögunnar. En um leið er Halldór fyrsti íslenski teiknarinn af fleirum sem notar fornsögurnar sem einskonar Trójuhest til að lauma myndasögunni framhjá íhaldsömum hliðvörðum íslenskrar menningar. Sögurnar í *Lesbók barnanna* frá 1959 til 1961 marka upphafið á frjóu tímabili þegar gerðar eru ýmsar og ólíkar tilraunir til að sviðsetja fornritin sem myndasögur. Þeir sem fylgdu næst fordæmi Halldórs í þessu efni voru Kjartan Guðjónsson sem birti myndasöguna *Haralds saga harðráða* í *Þjóðviljanum* árið 1964, Ragnar Lár(usson) sem birti myndasöguna *Gunnlaugs sögu ormstungu* í *Tímanum* sama ár og Haraldur Guðbergsson sem birti nokkrar styttri og lengri myndasögur byggðar á eddukvæðum og *Snorra Eddu* í *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* á árunum 1964 til 1965.[4] Hér er um að ræða efni sem kallar á frekari rannsóknir.

[4] Ragnar Lár birti einnig myndasögu sína „Finnboga sögu ramma" í *Morgunblaðinu* 1972. Ýmsir fleiri teiknarar hafa spreytt sig á þessu sviði síðan, þeirra á meðal Kristján Guðmundsson sem hóf að birta „Ferðina til Vínlands" í *Þjóðviljanum* 1984 og Búi Kristjánsson sem vann sögu upp úr *Laxdæla sögu* og hóf að birta í *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* 1993 (hún kom seinna út í tveimur bókum). Búi vann aðra sögu upp úr hluta *Egils sögu* („Úlfur og örn") sem birtist í *Morgunblaðinu* veturinn 1996 til 1997 og var svo síðar endurbirt í myndasögublaðinu *Zeta*. Veigamesta verkefnið á þessu sviði eru fjórar myndasögur byggðar á *Njálu* sem Ingólfur Gíslason og Embla Ýr Bárudóttir sendu frá sér á tímabilinu 2003 til 2007.

**„Þetta er víst allt mér að kenna“**

Í umfjöllun sinni um bandarísk hasarblöð segir Kristín Svava Tómasdóttir (2018, 115) að þau hafi tilheyrt „hinu óstýriláta rými frímínútnanna, götunnar og sjoppunnar, þar sem kennarar, uppeldisfræðingar og skólabókaverðir höfðu engin áhrif.“ Áhugavert er að samstarfsmenn Halldórs Pétursson ar við sviðsetningu íslenskra fornrita, þeir Marinó L. Stefánsson og Kristján J. Gunnarsson, komu báðir úr kennarastétt og sömu sögu er að segja af Jóhanni Frímann sem hrósaði myndlýsingum Halldórs í *Faxa*. Drjúgur hluti þeirra sem blönduðu sér í deilurnar um myndir Halldórs í *Íslandssögu handa börnum* 1967 hafði einnig tengsl við skólakerfið. Voru sumir sammála Kristjáni um að ef farið yrði að ”ritskoða! ofbeldið úr fornsögunum af sérstakri tillitssemi við börn yrði lítið eftir af frumtextunum. Þetta var afstaða Sigurgeirs Jónssonar (1967; 2) barnaskólakennara sem birti grein um málið í *Fylki*, málgagni Sjálfstæðisflokksins í Vestmannaeyjum: „Hefðu títtnefndir kennarar Austurbæjarskólans verið látnir um að myndskreyta bókina“, sagði hann, „hefði Gunnar eflaust verið önnum kafinn við að hjúkra særðum fjandmanni á bökkum Rangár og Magnús konungur hefði ekki verið með vín í horni sínu, heldur hefði hann trúlega boðið Sighvati [Sturlu] upp á glas af mjólk eða kóka kóla.“ Aðrir fundu myndunum hins vegar allt til foráttu og bentu jafnvel á hvílík tímaskekkja það væri að endurútgefa sextíu ára gamla kennslubók. „Kröfur til kennslu og menntunar hafa breytzt á sama hátt og ógerningur að snúa við aftur til „hinna gömlu góðu daga”, jafnvel þótt Kristján J. Gunnarsson og Halldór Pétursson, listmálari telji okkur þar bezt komna“, sagði í grein annars kennara í *Fylki* (Fr. P. 1967).

Áhugavert er að Jónas frá Hriflu stakk líka niður penna um málið, ríflega áttræður að aldri. Hann rifjaði upp tildrög þess að hann skrifaði *Íslandssögu handa börnum* og hrósaði jafnframt Halldóri fyrir teikningarnar í nýju útgáfunni. Í niðurlagi sagði hann að deilurnar um hana væru líklegar til að gera bókina að verðmætum safngrip: „Eintök af henni verða ef til vill síðar seld eins og kjörgripir, þegar fræðimenn keppa um sjaldgæfar, eftirsóknarverðar bækur á uppboðum bókamanna í Reykjavík. En innan tíðar verður þessi bók samt eins og aðrir gamlir góðir hlutir lögð til hliðar“ (Jónas Jónsson 1967). Ekki er ljóst hvað Halldóri sjálfum þótti um þá orrahríð sem teikning hans af (ofur)hetjunni Gunnari vakti. Hann taldi ekki eftir sér að breyta myndinni og í viðtali við blaðamann *Morgunblaðsins* axlaði hann alla ábyrgð á málinu. Hann setti þó um leið fyrirvara við ályktunina sem kennararnir í Austurbæjarskólanum höfðu sent frá sér:

> Þeim fannst myndin of hörkuleg af Gunnari, en alltaf má deila um slíkt. Nýja myndin er af sama atburði, en öðru vísi og er því ekki eins raunsæ. Á síðari myndinni er maðurinn kominn í ána og Gunnar stendur á bakkanum með beran atgeirinn. — Þetta er víst allt mér að kenna. Ég fékk engin fyrirmæli um teikningarnar og mér var ekkert mótmælt, er ég afhenti þær, en ég leyfi mér að taka mér í munn orð kerlingarinnar, að ekki sé gaman af guðspjöllunum sé enginn í þeim bardaginn. Lítt þýðir að breiða yfir það, að fornsögur lýsa mjög bardögum og drápum, enda væru þær litlausar án slíks. (Morgunblaðið 1967, 2 og 27)

Mynd 8: „… sumum kastaði hann af atgeirnum út á Rangá.“ Mynd Halldórs Péturssonar úr endurbættri útgáfu Ríkisútgáfu námsbóka á Íslands sögu eftir Jónas Jónsson frá 1968.

Lokaorð Halldórs eru eina opinbera stefnuyfirlýsing hans sem túlkanda íslenskra fornsagna það ég best veit.

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# LIVED LEGEND AND THE MANY VICTORIES OF THE EPIC OF DEFEAT

Carl Lindahl*

**Lived Legend: The Grimms and Linda Dégh**

The Grimms, who launched the folkloristic study of the legend with their *Deutsche Sagen*, regularly treated legends as living things – writing, for example, that "nature protects" both trees and legends "with eternal, self-generating renewals" (Ward 1981, 3). The Grimms saw legend as more real and alive than history itself. Legend lives alongside its narrative communities, endlessly in motion in their homes:

> There is actually nothing that the folk can gain from "true history" … that has not already been conveyed to them by means of the legend. The people will either remain alienated from an historic event that has been transported through time and space if it does not fulfill this condition, or they will simply ignore it. … Yet how unswerving is their allegiance to the legacy of the legends that tradition has given them … and that have become attached to their most common concerns. They are never bored by them, for they do not perceive them as mere idle play … Instead the legends are considered a necessary part of their households … [T]he constant motion and lasting security of folk legends represent the most reassuring and most refreshing of God's gifts to man. (Ward 1981, 3)

In the last third of the twentieth century, Linda Dégh extended the Grimms' characterization to its natural fulfillment: if the legend is alive and moves people with a truth and power greater than history can, if legend cohabits with us, might legend also possess the capacity to inhabit us? Humans can be induced to *live* legend. A legend is more than a narrative; it acts *upon* us, presenting us with a script that guides our actions. Through "ostensive action" (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983) the narrative community debates, experiences, re-enacts, and essentially lives the legendary narrative.

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The Grimms imply that a legend is more than a story: there are "details that accompany narration:" the community's familiarity with the sites and events to which the legend alludes (Ward 1981, 2). In Dégh's extension of the Grimms' view, a legend can manifest itself as something more, and other, than a story: through the process of dramatization, it may incorporate ritual, debate, testimonial, allusion, proverb, and other acts or expressions to carry its message. A legend may be stable in content, but it is also extraordinarily variable in the forms it takes and in the media through which it is expressed (Dégh 1971).

For the Grimms, not every historical narrative will meet the criteria of a living legend, let alone a lived one: narrative communities will "ignore" or feel "alienated" from historical accounts that cannot match the immediacy of the narratives that move them most (Ward 1981, 3). Dégh's characterization of legend-sharing communities diverges from the Grimms' in at least one important respect: the emotional realms that legends inhabit. The Grimms portray legend-telling folk as comfortable with the "constant motion and lasting security" of their most cherished legends, but Dégh finds many of the legend's motions extremely agitating. Tellers often find their beliefs threatened and repeat their legendary accounts to force their strongest beliefs into the realm of accepted fact. Such legends need to be retold again and again precisely because they lack certainty and security (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983, 1995).

**Rosenberg's Epic of Defeat**

Dégh's view of legend as drama applies particularly aptly to one long-lived and widely distributed legend complex, some versions of which have developed into *lived* legends, exerting powerful effects on the listeners, spurring intensely emotional actions and reactions. This pervasive legend complex is the Epic of Defeat. The term was coined by the literary folklorist Bruce A. Rosenberg, who perceived a 17-part pattern of content in legendary accounts of devastating military defeats dating back at least 3000 years in Middle Eastern and Western traditions. Some of the legend-spawning battles that share this pattern – like the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae (480 BCE) and the annihilation of the Texas Alamo defenders (1836 CE) – were verifiable and relatively well-documented events; others – like Carthage's destruction of Mathos' Libyan rebels (ca. 237 BCE) occupied only a few sentences (in Polybius' *Histories*) that later narrators expanded (as when Flaubert inflated Polybius into a full-blown fiction, *Salembbo*). In other cases, like the last stand of King Arthur's nephew Gawain (in the Middle English *Alliterative Morte Arthur*), there exists no historically identifiable antecedent of the hero or the battle. The pattern crops up persistently, with or without preceding events or accounts to build upon.

Like the legend itself as described by Dégh, the Epic of Defeat does not take a constant form, and it is not solely narrative. It can exist in oral, noncanonical form – like the Jewish legends that sprang up around the battle of Mount Gilboa, which are far more detailed than, and different in nature from, the brief biblical passage (1 Samuel: 31) known to Christians around the world; or as a prose historical account, like Herodotus'

description of Thermopylae; a full-blown verse epic, *Chanson de Roland*; or as a cluster of legends, poems, symbols, and images that never gel into one fixed account – as with the Alamo. In all cases, we can label the pattern "legendary," but its expressions straddle numerous genres.

At the core of the Epic of Defeat is the devastating death of a hero and all his men. All the versions identified by Rosenberg drive toward one or both of two primary goals: either to account for how "our hero," the "best of us" could be so totally slaughtered; or to marshal listeners' fury and violence against the battle's victor. Most commonly, the epic performs both functions; in lived legend, vengeance is the primary trigger.

Here, in Rosenberg's words, are the 17 constituent elements:

a) The hero and a small band are
b) Surrounded and overwhelmed by
c) A much larger force of
d) Racial or national aliens.
e) Rash courage or pride has led him to fight at all, and
f) Though the battle goes well at first,
g) Treason or cowardice among one or more of his men turns the tide.
h) A heroic stand is made in which
i) Many of the enemy are killed
j) On or near a mountain from which
k) Help has been summoned, though it is too late.
l) The hero spurns a chance to escape, preferring to die with his men.
m) Wielding a sword which has served him well in the past, the hero is
n) Among the last to die, if not the last.
o) One man, usually insignificant, survives and carries the news.
p) A eulogy is intoned over the hero's corpse, often by his slayer, but
q) The victors are punished by vengeful comrades or countrymen of the hero.
(Rosenberg 1975, 169–70)

Comparatists assume that the more detailed and complex the pattern, the more likely that all examples are related historically. In his published explorations, Rosenberg produces copious (yet, I contend, insufficiently organized) evidence to conclude that the pattern is legitimate (Rosenberg 1972; 1974; 1975). He also concludes, in alignment with much of his evidence but against many scholarly assumptions, that no historical influence is necessary to generate the pattern: The 17 elements are therefore intrinsic to a conceptual realm that transcends cultural and temporal barriers.

What must actually happen in the real world to trigger the creation of an Epic of Defeat? Your hero and some soldiers are annihilated by an enemy force. Once this one element appears, nearly all remaining elements fall immediately into place. The first and second columns of Table 1, below, detail how Herodotus' account of Thermopylae conforms with Rosenberg's elements. Elements 'c' and 'g' explain how a greatly superior warrior can be defeated; if being outnumbered 350 to 1 is not sufficient to explain

Leonidas' defeat, Herodotus also adds the cowardice of the Thebans and the betrayal of Ephialtes. Still, the hero needs to kill innumerable others before dying ('i') and this is exactly what the Spartans do for two full days before succumbing on the third. Similarly, anyone can be massacred, but a hero needs to prove himself willingly massacred by refusing an escape option (element 'l'; in Herodotus, Leonidas rejects Xerxes' offer). And who will ever believe such an extraordinary tale unless it is narrated by a sole surviving witness (element 'o'; here Aristodemus)?

**Thermopylae's Breaks from the Epic Pattern**

Table 1 (on the next page) demonstrates that the Thermopylae and the Alamo epics adhere closely, but not identically, to Rosenberg's pattern. Narrative constellations often exhibit great stability in plot and content, but great dynamism in function and meaning. Plot elements that remain the same from century to century *might* undergo numerous changes in function and meaning over time, but elements that suddenly appear, disappear, or show significant modification almost inevitably suggest a dramatic change in the meanings or functions of a given legend's purpose or performance.

No matter what the historical facts, legends tend to rearrange history to re-create patterns of "social truths" important to the tellers. The pattern becomes more consequential than what actually happened, because the pattern will shape the next narrative, no matter how divergent the facts. The narrative pattern first *models* history, and ultimately *creates* both history and reality as ostension compels the legend community to live out the pattern.

In the case of Thermopylae: All substantial divergences from the pattern have to do with the identification of the hero. The indisputable choice is Leonidas, yet all the Spartans are equally heroes. This perception is borne out by two memorial dedications that the Greeks erected at the battle site. No monument to Leonidas was found there; instead, there is a monument inscribed, "Foreigner, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their commands." All met the same fate as Leonidas; all were simply doing what their polis expected of them. The second battlefield inscription is even more telling and stands in stark contrast to the twenty-first-century obsession with the 300 who held the pass for two days by extending honor to all the Spartans and allies who died on the third: "Here four thousand from the Peloponnese once fought three million" (Herodotus 2010, book 7, ch. 228; see Flower 1998).

Thus ('a') Leonidas is *both* a singular hero and just one of 300 (or 4000), both perfect king and perfect soldier. This variation speaks to Herodotus' purpose; he foregrounds the interdependence of the Greek polises. In contrast, the normative Epic of Defeat plot focuses on one exceptional hero; those who die with him serve as foils to his greatness rather than as proofs of their own. This hero is a great warrior, not a smart commander or tactician. His recklessness is an essential part of his heroism, and the epics dedicated to him celebrate even those excesses that cause his fall. Byrhtnoth (in the Old English *Battle of Malden*, 991 CE) gives up his secure battle position because his opponents complain that they do not have an equal chance; he thereby converts certain victory to

certain defeat. To enhance his glory, Custer divides his command and rides into the Battle of the Little Bighorn with a small force, thus ensuring their total annihilation. In *Chanson de Roland*, "Roland is valiant, and Olivier is wise" (Rosenberg 1974, 255); Olivier knows that annihilation is avoidable if Charlemagne is alerted on time, but Roland persists in going it alone. Custer, Byrhtnoth, and Roland, unlike Leonidas, are all flawed commanders, but they are exemplary crazed warriors.

**Table 1. TWO EPICS OF DEFEAT** **Boldface** denotes divergence from the pattern [ ] Square Brackets indicate historical facts and estimates

| EPIC OF DEFEAT PATTERN | HERODOTUS' THERMOPYLAE | ALAMO IN 19TH-CENTURY ORAL AND WRITTEN SOURCES |
|---|---|---|
| a) **The hero and a small band** | **Leonidas and 300/4000 Spartans are all heroes** | **Travis, Bowie, Crockett and 179 Texians are all heroes** |
| b) surrounded, overwhelmed | yes | yes |
| c) a much larger force of | 2,500,000 [historians estimate under 200,000] | 6000 [fewer than 1800 took were present in the attack] |
| d) racial or national aliens. | Persians | Mexicans [though many defenders were also Mexican] |
| e) **Rash courage or pride** | **Leonidas is on a suicide mission** | **Travis is on a suicide mission** |
| has led him to fight at all, and | Oracle states that either | to buy time for Houston's army |
| | Sparta or its king will be lost | [no evidence that this was a motive] |
| f) the battle goes well at first | First 2 days were great successes | Texians depicted as killing many enemies in first few minutes |
| g) treason or cowardice among | Ephialtes / The Thebans defect | Juan Seguin, a Tejano [left the fort for |
| one or more of his men turn the tide. | | reinforcements; later accused of treason] |
| h) A heroic stand is made | yes | yes [disputed accounts state some begged for their lives] |
| i) many of the enemy are killed | 300 Spartans kill 20,000 Persians | Each defender kills 10 enemies [each killed about 3] |
| j) on or near a mountain | yes | legend depicts heroes fighting on top of a mountain-shaped |
| | | mission roof [there was no roof at the time of the battle] |
| k) help has been summoned, | yes | yes |
| though too late. | | |
| l) The hero spurns a chance to escape | Leonidas refuses Xerxes' offer | **Travis offers every man a way out; only 1 leaves** |
| preferring to die with his men. | | [this account first emerged 37 years after the battle] |
| m) Wielding a sword that's served him | yes; at the end, Spartans drop their spears | Travis uses a sword, Bowie a knife, Crockett a rifle butt |
| well in the past, the hero is | and fight with swords hand to hand | all depicted fighting hand to hand |
| n) among the last to die, if not the last. | **Leonidas dies early** | **Travis dies early,** from a gunshot to the head; Crockett and |
| | | Bowie die late or last [no consensus on when they died] |
| o) One man, usually insignificant, survives | Aristodemus | Moses Rose, the man who did not cross the line in the sand |
| and carries the news. | | |
| **p) A eulogy is intoned over the hero's corpse,** | **no eulogy from slayer** | **no eulogy from slayer** |
| **often by his slayer** | **later memorials honored all defenders** | **later memorials honored all defenders** |
| | **IN LEGEND AND FACT** | |
| q) Victors are punished | Battle of Salamis, 3 weeks later, | Battle of San Jacinto, 6 weeks later, forced Mexican surrender |
| by hero's vengeful comrades | destroyed Persian fleet, | and led to the creation of the Republic of Texas; |
| or countrymen | giving Greeks the upper hand | the victors' battle cry was 'Remember the Alamo!' |

The most important mission of an Epic of Defeat as *lived legend* is to infuse its audience with a passion for vengeance. The final element of Rosenberg's pattern ('q') is the destruction of the army that massacred the hero. The *Chanson de Roland* is a delivery system for battle rage; it became a *lived legend* when used to incite soldiers into battle, as at the Battle of Hastings (1066 CE), where William the Conqueror's Norman army faced off against the English. Chronicler William of Malmesbury reports that just before the initial charge the *cantilena Rollandi* was sung "in order that the warlike example of that hero might stimulate the soldiers" (1125 CE; Robinson 1904, 225). A later chronicler (Wace, 1155 CE) writes of a minstrel, Taillefer, "who sang very well, … mounted on a horse that raced along… in front of the Duke singing of Charlemagne, Roland, and

Oliver and the knights who died at Roncevaux" and then rode out to strike the battle's first blow, immediately converting vengeful song to vengeful action (Taylor 2001, 29; cf. Sayers 1983). The *Chanson de Roland* is not about the Saxons that the Normans fought in 1066, but instead about a battle fought centuries earlier against Muslim Saracens. Yet Roland's song served to "stimulate" the troops to fighting mode. After Roland's death, the *Chanson* narrates Charlemagne's revenge on the Saracens; in singing of Roland before charging, William's army incited itself to convert *Roland*'s plot into one compelling historical fact: Norman victory. Returning to Thermopylae: Leonidas is not Roland; it is inaccurate to assert that the Spartan is motivated by "rash courage or pride" (element 'e'); rather, Herodotus argues, Leonidas chose to sacrifice himself to save his polis: though seeking "glory above all the other Spartans," Leonidas is a committed martyr (Herodotus 2010, book 7, chs 220–22) strategizing a sacrifice that will ultimately ensure Greek victory (cf. Zhekov 2012).

**The Afterlife of Leonidas in North America: "Come and Take It"**

The Thermopylae epic undoubtedly influenced chroniclers of subsequent battles (Roman references to the battle are legion; Cartledge 2006; Rood 2017). Like the *Chanson de Roland*, Thermopylae was invoked not only to commemorate battles but also to provoke them. As a spur to martial actions, it is the figure of the warrior Leonidas that dominates. This reimagining of the Spartan king to fit the norm of the Epic of Defeat hero seems to have begun at least as early as the first century CE in Greece. Plutarch, born more than 500 years after Herodotus, compiled a collection of sayings that account for much of how the post-Classical world has depicted Leonidas and the 300. The 15 quotes attributed to Leonidas in "Sayings of Spartans" (Plutarch 1931) foreground Leonidas' boastful warrior side and underplay his strategic side. Plutarch reports, for example, that when others cautioned that he was taking too few men to Thermopylae, he said, "Too many for the enterprise on which we are going." Only one of the boasts that Plutarch ascribes to Leonidas also appears in Herodotus:

> When someone said, "Because of the arrows of the barbarians it is impossible to see the sun," he said, "Won't it be nice, then, if we shall have shade in which to fight them?" (Plutarch 1931, 349)

In Herodotus, it is *not* Leonidas but another Spartan, Dieneces, who makes this boast (Herodotus 2010, book 7, ch. 226). Through the centuries, Leonidas progressively sheds his less warlike traits as he absorbs words and actions formerly attributed to other fighters.

The Plutarch quote that came to define Leonidas and the Spartans in American history was a response to a written command from the Persian emperor Xerxes to hand over his weapons. Leonidas' laconic reply: "Come and take [them]." At least since the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783), American fighters have quoted Plutarch's Leonidas. Thermopylae was the prime example of the Epic of Defeat ethos, representing fierce resistance to a hated enemy. In 1778, as the besieging British army demanded the

surrender of Fort Morris, Georgia, American revolutionary Colonel John McIntosh replied, "Come and take it." The British withdrew; the phrase was credited with saving the Americans from a British attack. In 1864, during the American Civil War, Confederate General Hood demanded the surrender of a Union post in Georgia. The Union commander wrote to the general, "If you want it, come and take it." In both cases, the boaster successfully weathered the enemy attack. "Come and take it" became a means of displaying a desperate resolve that often succeeded in inducing would-be attackers to back off. "Come and take it" communicated the message that the speaker was ready to die rather than surrender. But if the boast failed to repel the enemy, the boaster must be prepared to die. In 1864, Mary Chesnutt, wife of a Confederate General, lamented that Confederate soldiers who retreated from a Union army had failed to execute their "Thermopylae business:" they survived (Rood 2017). The evidence from the first century of American military tradition suggests that "Come and take it" has become the title of a battle strategy: shout these words to the opposing army to convince them that you are willing to fight to the death and hope that your boast will be enough to scare them off, and if indeed you do die, you'll inherit a remnant of Leonidas' glory.

Among the myriad nineteenth-century American allusions to Thermopylae, the Battle of the Alamo stands out. Today a plaque at the battle site's mission church proclaims the Alamo to be "The Thermopylae of Texas;" taking the comparison to the extreme, a nineteenth-century journalist referred to the Alamo as "the world's Thermopylae" (Rood 2017), implying that the Spartans fought only for Greek freedom, but that the Alamo defenders fought to free everyone.

The battle was fought on the frontiers of two young nations. When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, Texas became a Mexican state, sharing a border with the expanding United States. The *Tejano* (Mexican-born) population was extremely sparse; Mexico encouraged Anglos to immigrate, offering land at prices far lower than in the United States. In exchange, Texas Anglos (*Texians*) were to swear allegiance to Mexico and convert to Catholicism. The *Texian* population swelled; many refused to swear allegiance. The Mexican government, formerly relatively egalitarian, became more oppressive. Both *Tejanos* and *Texians* began resisting Mexico's central government. In 1830, Mexico closed its borders to the U.S., but Americans kept pouring in. Resistance became rebellion.

Echoes of Thermopylae sounded five months before the Alamo battle. In the war's first skirmish, a Mexican general ordered the town of Gonzales to return a cannon that *Texians* had borrowed from the Mexicans. Rebel settlers responded, paraphrasing Plutarch's Leonidas, "Ven y Tómalo." *Texian* women sewed a flag picturing a cannon and the motto, translated to "Come and Take It" (Figure 1). The settlers successfully repelled the Mexicans. The image on the Gonzales flag can be found everywhere in Texas today, on t-shirts, baseball caps, covid and other merchandize (Cook 2015), including covid masks (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Texian "Come and Take It" battle flag, modeled on the lost flag flown at the Battle of Gonzales (1835). This copy hangs in the Texas state capitol building, Austin. The Spanish motto on the original flag, "*Ven y Tómalo*," was immediately replaced with its English-language equivalent, a change consonant with the re-purposing of the legend to pit Anglos against all Spanish-speaking Mexicans, including Tejanos.

Figure 2. Ted Cruz, United States Senator from Texas and a leader in the movement to de-certify the election of Joe Biden on 6 January 2021, wearing a "Come and Take It" covid mask at Biden's presidential inauguration, 20 January 2021.

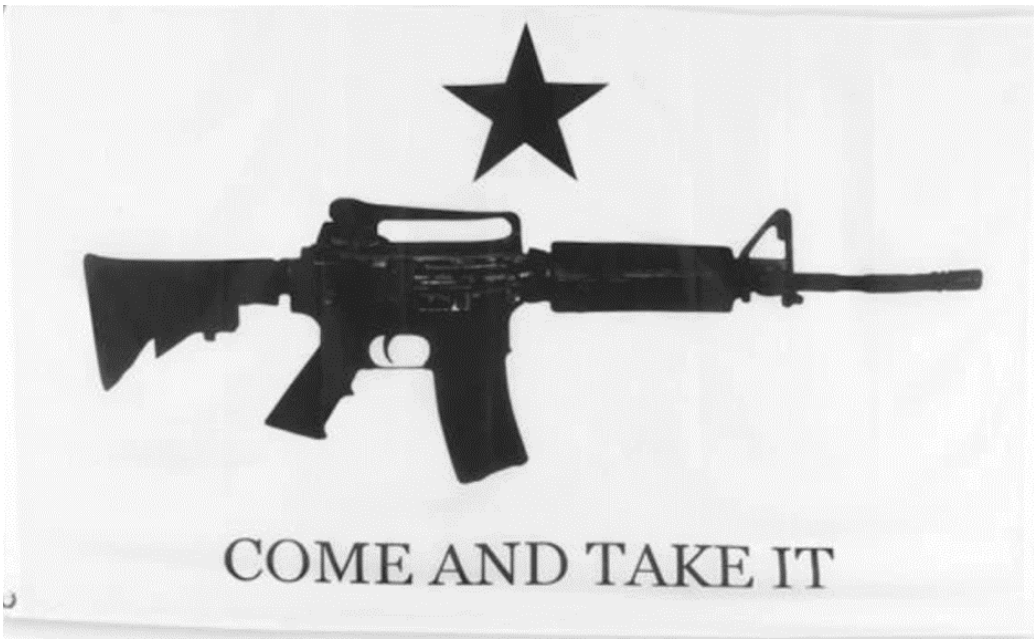


Figure 3. "Gun rights" activists and right-wing militias have transformed the cannon on the Gonzales "Come and Take It" flag into an assault rifle. This version of the flag, designed by David C. Treibs, is marketed by Ruffin Flag Supply, Washington, Georgia.

Figure 4. The US-made SigSauer1911 Spartan handgun, inscribed with Leonidas' motto, *Molon Labe* ("come take them") in Greek orthography.

In January 1836 Mexico's President, Santa Anna, led 6019 soldiers into Texas to crush all resistance. The *Texians* scrambled to field an army. Santa Anna's army reached San Antonio and demanded the surrender of the poorly fortified Alamo mission. *Texian* Colonel William B. Travis fired a canon shot in response and that night wrote a letter "To the People of Texas and All Americans in the World" calling for reinforcements and pledging "VICTORY or DEATH!" On 6 March, after a 13-day siege, the Mexican army finally attacked, sending about 1800 soldiers against some 180 armed defenders. The army breached the fort walls within 45 minutes, and after another 45 all defending fighters were dead. Santa Anna ordered all enemy corpses piled up and burned.

**From "America's Thermopylae" to Insurrection Motto**

As Table 1 illustrates, the Alamo and Thermopylae accounts are quite similar in their conformation with, and in their breaks from, the Rosenberg pattern. Yet the two epics differ from each other significantly in their effects and purposes. Both display some tension in identifying a hero (element 'a'). We have noted how Leonidas shares center stage with all 300 Spartans. Although the post-Classical vision of Leonidas and the Spartans stressed raw courage over discipline and obedience, Thermopylae accounts continued to emphasize shared sacrificial obedience. In contrast, in both history and legend, the Alamo had no one command, no unifying hero. Alamo epic-makers promoted the portrait of a group of individuals united only in ironclad commitment to personal freedom. There is no Spartan law to which they lie obedient. Even the commanders do not get along. Travis fills the Leonidas role as the defiant leader. Bowie and Crockett, established folk heroes before they entered the Alamo, embodied unruly independence over social responsibility. Debates about the identity of the Alamo hero were resolved 37 years after the battle when the most famous Alamo legend first reached print.

> In the final days of the siege Travis assembled the fighting men and announced that there was no hope for reinforcements and no hope for surviving the imminent attack. He then drew a line in the sand with his sword, challenging them to cross the line to join him if they chose to stay, fight, and die – or to stay where they were if they chose to live. All but one man crossed to Travis' side. The lone coward became the legendary sole survivor.

This story ties element 'a' to element 'l' (hero spurns a chance to escape); there is no credible evidence to support this story, but its enduring popularity testifies to its success in depicting all defenders equally as heroes. The phrase "line in the sand" has since become an American proverb for posing a momentous, life-and-death challenge. The story also supplies element 'o', the lone survivor who bears the tale of the defeat. In fact, there were many noncombatant survivors: Black slaves and *Texian* and *Tejano* women and children.

Days after the massacre, when a party of survivors reached Commander Sam Houston and told him about the massacre, he immediately compared the Alamo to Thermopylae. On 13 March he wrote, "The conduct of our brave men in the Alamo was

only equaled by Spartan valor" (Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stanford 2021, 132). On 24 March, the earliest Texan newspaper account gave an epic-of-defeat-style battle description, repeating Houston's allusion to Thermopylae. These instant comparisons had the immediate effect of infuriating *Texians*; also, U.S. citizens streamed across the border to join Houston's army. The ultimate goal of the Epic of Defeat, element 'q' – victors punished by vengeful comrades – was fulfilled just 46 days after the Alamo's fall. Houston cried out "Remember the Alamo!" as he led the *Texians* into battle. He could not restrain his fired-up volunteers from clubbing and stabbing Mexican soldiers who tried to surrender, pleading, "Mi no Alamo." *Texian* battle rage ended in 630 Mexican deaths and 600 prisoners, against 16 *Texian* fatalities. Santa Anna was captured; by the terms of surrender, Santa Anna spared his life and lost his state (the exact opposite of Leonidas' choice). Neither *Texians* nor Mexicans doubted that it was the massacre at the Alamo that won the battle of San Jacinto and led to Texan independence.

Comparisons to Thermopylae persisted. *Texian* Reuben M. Potter composed "Hymn of the Alamo" seven months after the battle. An excerpt:

Welcome the Spartan's death—
'Tis no despairing strife—
We fall! We die! But our expiring breath
Is Freedom's breath of life!
Here, on this new Thermopylae,
Our monument shall tower on high,
And 'Alamo' hereafter be
In bloodier fields the battle cry.
(Burrough, Tomlinson, and Sanford 2021, 149)

To Potter, the dead are equal, all dying for freedom (no mention of defending a home, or a nation's laws). Here, as in Thermopylae, conscious communal self-sacrifice diverges from the epic pattern (element 'e').

But Alamo legends quickly converted the Mexican enemy from a corrupt, oppressive government to a fundamentally evil race. Element 'd' of the pattern identifies the victorious army as "racial or national aliens." The enemy's brutality is stressed in both Greek and Texan accounts. In other epics of defeat, the dead hero proves so heroic that his slayer praises him (element 'p'), but Xerxes and Santa Anna are both monsters who abuse the heroes' corpses. Nevertheless, although the Persians are clearly "national aliens," the extent of animosity shown toward the Mexicans in the Alamo lived legend is much more vicious – and more ironic, given that many Tejanos joined (and sometimes led) resistance to the Mexican government. The Alamo epic's single greatest distortion of fact to fit the epic pattern is the near-total erasure of Tejanos from its pantheon of heroes. In at least some cases, Rosenberg's posited Epic of Defeat presents a pattern that applies to certain legends.

In certain ancient, medieval, and nineteenth-century contexts, a lived legend complex has exerted extreme power over some who shared it. Epic accounts of an ancient Greek

battle that changed Mediterranean history scripted a battle that changed North American history.

The intensity of emotion provoked by such legend complexes is a far cry from the comforting motions that the Grimms found in the *Deutsche Sagen*. Over time, the messages of strategizing, interdependence, and sacrifice interwoven into the narratives of Thermopylae and the Alamo have spun off into allusions, images, proverbs, and armed displays that invoke defiant violence. Self-styed patriot militias in the U.S. currently arm themselves with the Spartan assault rifle and a pistol inscribed with Plutarch's Leonidas motto, *Molon Labe*, "Come and take them" (figure 4). On 20 January 2021, two weeks after the insurrectionist assault on the U.S. Capitol, insurrectionist U.S. Senator Ted Cruz of Texas wore a covid face mask emblazoned with the Gonzales cannon and the motto, "Come and Take It" at the presidential inauguration of Joe Biden (figure 2). Recent incarnations of the "Come and Take It" flag now feature an assault rifle (figure 3) as white supremacists have adopted the Alamo legend as a master narrative. In 2020, Black Lives Matter protesters spraypainted, "white supremacy, profit over people, the ALAMO" on a monument memorializing the Alamo defenders; within days a group calling itself "This Is Texas Freedom Force" appeared at the Alamo in army fatigues with assault rifles and body armor to "protect" the Alamo (Burrough, Tomlinson, and Stafford 2021, 336). The persistent, demonstrable power of *lived legend* to stir emotions in often violent and sometimes history-shaping ways is more reason than we need to justify its study.

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# BORDER AREA PEOPLE AND THEIR CONTACTS ACROSS THE LONG NORWEGIAN/SWEDISH NATIONAL BORDER

Anders Gustavsson*

A Swedish-Norwegian research project, 'Cultural Encounters at the Border,' examined cross-border contacts in the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century on the southernmost stretch of the long Swedish-Norwegian border, the provinces of Bohuslän and Dalsland in Sweden and the county of Østfold in Norway (Danielsson and Gustavsson 1999).

The main aim of this project was to investigate cross-border contacts and how they were viewed by the authorities, by travellers, and especially by the people living near the border, in changing political, economic, legal, and cultural circumstances. At the border, the 'grand' national history meets the 'small' regional and local history. The national border is a phenomenon created from above, which in a particular way intervenes in the lives of the residents and which might traverse cultural, social and ideological borders. At the local and regional level, the border is not necessarily as significant as a demarcation between countries as it is on the national plane. Contacts between the local population on either side of the border can act as a cement uniting the countries. This study focuses on the local micro-perspective, which is also, of course, related to what happens on the national macro-level in the form of regulations, controls, and sanctions.

How have the national governments on either side handled this boundary? What has been regulated and how have the regulations been maintained through checks and sanctions by representatives of the government in the form of customs officers, the police, and the armed forces? How have the local people and travellers arriving at the border acted? How have they tried to get around the regulations when they had social and economic interests in crossing the border with as little hindrance as possible?

This study builds on several different categories of sources. These are, first, the records in ethnological archives in Gothenburg, Stockholm, Uddevalla, Sarpsborg, and

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Oslo. I have also performed field work together with ethnology students in Sweden and Norway in the form of interviews and observations. Then there are the records of the local court and the police in Strömstad. In addition, there is copious newspaper material, especially from the Swedish *Strömstads Tidning* and the Norwegian *Halden Arbeiderblad* near the border.

**Labour Immigration to Norway in the Late Nineteenth Century**

In the late nineteenth century, there was heavy labour migration from Sweden to the growing industrial areas and the fertile agricultural districts in Østfold county in Norway. The immigrants came from poor rural areas of western Sweden near Norway. That means Dalsland and northern Bohuslän, which had seen vigorous population growth (Svendsen 2003).

Fig. 1. Map showing the southern border between Norway and Sweden.
Drawing by Torill Sand, Oslo.

The Swedes felt welcome because of the shortage of labour in Norway during the early industrialisation of areas close to the Swedish border, in the brickworks, sawmills,

quarries, and the textile industry.Wages were considered to be good in comparison with the poverty on the Swedish side of the border. This labour migration was made possible when the need for Swedes to have passports was abolished in Norway in 1860 (Kolsrud 1990). The migration culminated in the 1890s, before Norway, in 1901, introduced a law requiring travellers and foreigners to register. This was aimed in large measure at Swedish guest workers.

The migrant workers, mostly men, found jobs at sawmills, brickworks, quarries, and in farming. In the expanding Norwegian brick industry, the majority of the workers were Swedes. Women found employment on farms and in the textile industry in the Norwegian border town of Halden. Many seasonal workers crossed the border to work in the summer. The brickworks only operated during the summer half of the year. Some seasonal labourers married and settled down in Norway. Many mixed marriages arose in this way between Swedes and Norwegians in Østfold. Other seasonal workers started families in Sweden.

Fig. 2. Swedish seasonal workers around 1900 at a brickworks in the Sarpsborg area. Photo: Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla 53 671, 43.

Another mobile category of workers was the stonecutters who came to northern Bohuslän in large numbers from Blekinge County in southern Sweden in the 1880s and 1890s (Danielsson and Norheim 2003). Several of the stonecutters moved on after a time to quarries in Østfold. Mobility in this occupational group was high until the men started a family on one or other side of the border. A stonecutter usually found a wife

who had grown up in a stonecutter's family. This led to the development of a distinctive stone-cutter culture where social and cultural affinity was more important than national belonging (Axelsson 1999).

The free churches gained a certain position in the southern parts of Østfold, and in the west of Dalsland at the end of the nineteenth century. It is interesting to measure the extent of cross-border influence brought by itinerant preachers and caused by the Swedish work migration to Norway. Norwegians and Swedes participated in free-church meetings on both sides of the border. The exchange of religious contacts strengthened the feeling of a regional identity.

**Unity at the Resolution of the Swedish-Norwegian Union in 1905**

A former feeling of unity in the close surroundings around the border remained during the tension on the national level between Norway and Sweden in the year 1905, when the personal union between the countries that had existed since 1814, ended. A war was looming between the two countries. Many soldiers were positioned on both sides of the border. The border people had during the two decades before 1905 constructed a network among the residents that transcended the national border and political conflicts on a national level (Gustavsson 2017).

The peasants' women experienced a notable anxiety concerning the war threat, through which their men might be drawn into the war. Also, the customs officers, who in their profession had constructed a network with colleagues on the other side of the border during the union years, experienced anxiety and distress concerning the war threat. In order to exercise their controlling work, the customs officers on both sides of the border needed to stay in regular touch with one another. A war threat from the national parliament was seen as a markedly disturbing element.

Similar views marked by solidarity between professional categories existed among stonecutters on both sides of the border. They appreciated the peaceful solution that resulted from the negotiations on the national level in 1905. One stonecutter born in 1897 talked about the "mutual friendship that existed between Norwegian and Swedish stonecutters, and the wish not to go to war against each other" (Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla).

**Norwegian Prohibition on Alcohol 1916–1927**

In 1908 the Faroe Islands imposed a prohibition on alcohol (Jacobsen 1995). This was followed by Iceland in 1915, Norway in 1916, and Finland in 1919, and then the USA. In Sweden, the prohibitionists lost a referendum in 1922 by a very small margin. Since 1917 there was a system with a ration book regulating alcohol sales. This system survived until 1955 (Johansson 2008, 157ff., 190ff.). The Norwegian prohibition concerned fortified wine and spirits from 1916–1923 and only spirits from 1923–1927 (Fuglum 1995; Johansen 2004). Weak beer was made legal in 1919 and strong beer in 1920.

How did illegal trade across the Swedish-Norwegian border develop in the prohibition years? Alcohol smuggling to Norway during the prohibition attained commercial proportions with large quantities on boats, especially from Germany but also from Denmark. These boats waited in the waters off Strömstad. Smuggling reached a peak in 1923. Two and a half million litres of spirits passed via Strömstad in nine months that year. A long-established pattern of alcohol consumption in Norway could not be broken overnight through legislation.

The big boats from Germany and Denmark, where alcohol was cheap and perfectly legal, anchored in international waters off Strömstad, while smaller boats went into the harbour and moored there. Until the middle of 1923, it was not possible to prohibit the boats from entering Strömstad harbour. The Grand Hotel in Strömstad was a meeting place and went under the name 'The Booze Hotel.' The buyers were called 'booze barons,' mainly merchants from Norway, but some Swedes also dealt. The time and place for deliveries outside the Swedish territorial border were agreed. Once the boats were out of Swedish territorial waters, the cargo could be reloaded and sold at the shallow area called Grisbådårna. The illegal traffic took place under cover of darkness (Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla). On 22 April 1923, a total of 47 people were charged, mainly inhabitants of Strömstad but also Norwegians, at the local court for illegal import of alcohol.

Everything that was seized by the customs officers was handed over to the customs house in Strömstad.

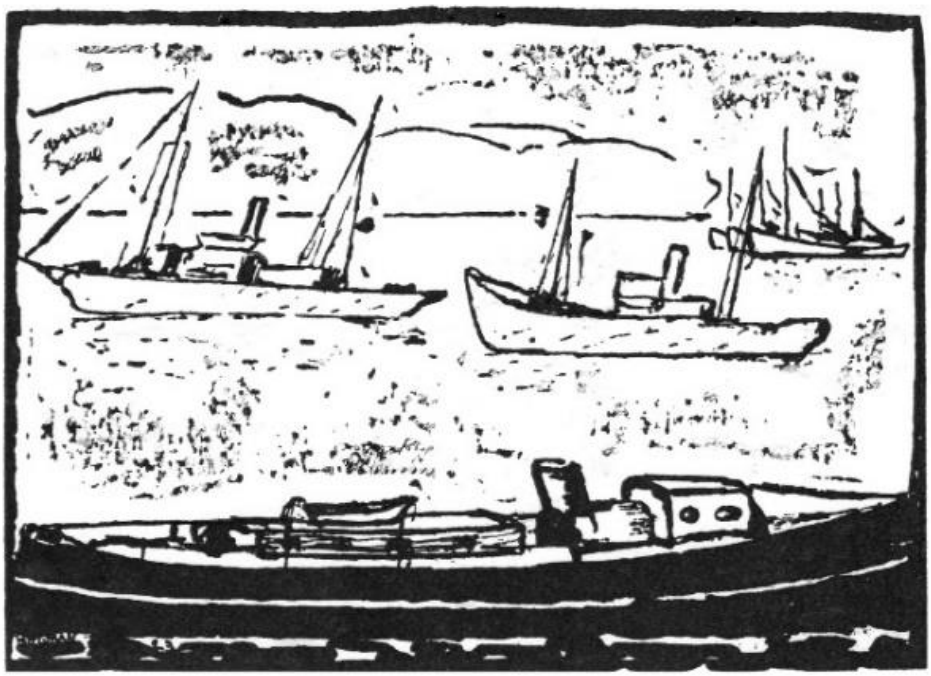

Fig. 3. Alcohol smuggling boats in Strömstad harbour.
Drawing in the newspaper *Bohusläningen* 20 January 1923.

Fig. 4. Seized ten-litre cans and bottles of spirits at the customs house in Strömstad in the early 1920s. Photo: Strömstad Museum, Strömstad D 632.

It confiscated large amounts of alcohol kept in ten-litre metal drums or in bottles. The smugglers were sentenced to a fine at the Strömstad court. When the customs were patrolling and seizing alcohol out to sea, there could be firing by both the customs and the smugglers. In October 1921 a Norwegian customs officer was shot dead by smugglers. In April 1924 two Norwegian smugglers were shot dead by the crew of a Norwegian customs cruiser (Johansen 1994, 86). Illicit spirits in ten-litre cans, dumped for fear of customs, floated ashore at different places along the coast in the border region. This meant free alcohol for those who found the cans. As a result, there was alcohol galore on the Norwegian Hvaler islands (Jensen 1993, 395f.). In the border areas, the prohibition had an effect diametrically opposed to the official intention. It became both easier and cheaper to procure alcohol, which led to increased consumption in the border zones.

With reference to the circumstances in Strömstad, the Swedish law was changed on 1 July 1923 so that alcohol boats could no longer use Strömstad or any other Swedish harbour as a base for their operations. In 1924 the Swedish territorial boundary was extended by one nautical mile so that the shallow area of Grisbådarna no longer was international water.

The smuggling was so profitable and in such demand that it even continued a few years after the Norwegian prohibition on alcohol had been lifted in 1927 (Johansen 2004, 48f.).

## Unity and Swedish Aid During the Second World War

Another crisis in the relations between Norway and Sweden arose when Germany invaded Norway on 9 April 1940. The Norwegian Quisling government, which obeyed the German Nazi occupying power in 1940–1945, prohibited contact across the border with only very few exceptions. The borderers on both sides of the border had to present individually issued 'border resident certificates' to the military power in order to move within the border region at all. This was the case also for children (Danielsson and Gustavsson 1999).

It was however possible for the borderers to fool the Germans through the connections established earlier, for example through the help of darkness and on the stretches with mostly inaccessible terrain between the carefully controlled border crossings. A Norwegian woman born in 1926 close to the border said:

> We weren't really so scared of the Germans, because they would not be out walking in the dark. They would come in cars, so we could see them.
> (Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla)

During this time it was a resource to live close to the border and personally know those who lived on the other side. The food parcels from the Swedish side of the border constituted a significant resource during the extensive food shortage in Norway. In return, the Norwegians often gave spirits, as that was the only commodity they could contribute. The Swedish parcels had to be opened by the Norwegian State censorship to be checked for anti-Nazi propaganda. Also, letters passing the border were opened and stamped with the German eagle.

Exchanging information was very important for the Norwegians during the war. This concerned radio stations, which were prohibited, but also Swedish newspapers, which could be transported across the border illegally. The Swedish borderers knew how to help the Norwegians to receive information. There were couriers within the resistance movement 'Home Front' who risked their lives by transferring contacts and information in the form of letters and newspapers across the border (Gustavsson 2019). A corresponding feeling of solidarity also existed among the national customs officers on both sides of the border and among border policemen. One option for them was to pretend not to see and not arrest refugees who came across the border to Sweden. The customs officers could fail to undertake inspection trips along the border or pretend that they had not seen anything. A saying arose among Swedish customs officers: "What I have not seen, I have not seen and what I have not heard, I have not heard." In such cases, they had nothing to report to higher authorities. About 15,000 refugees left the Halden area and crossed to Sweden in the Idefjorden border area.

In 1940, the free-church preacher Ludvig Olsson (1865–1948) got permission to cross the border to Norway to continue his preaching in Norwegian border districts. These free-church preachers formed one of the few exceptions from the prohibited border passages.

GRENZZONEN-BESCHEINIGUNG
Grenzzone West
GRENSEBOERBEVIS
Grensesone Vest
Nr. 130 44
157907
Polizeidirektor/Lensmann in
Politimesteren/Lensmannen i Tune og Rolvsøy
Inhaber dieser Grenzzonen-Bescheinigung,
Innehaveren av dette grenseboerbevis
Birgit Holmen geb. am 6 - 11 - 28 in
født den i Sarpsborg
Beruf: skolebarn Staatsangehörigkeit: norsk
Yrke: Nasjonalitet:
hat seinen/ihren ständigen Wohnsitz in:
har sin faste bopel i: Eger i Rolvsøy
Polizei/Lensmanns-Bezirk:
Politi/lensmanns-distrikt: Tune og Rolvs
Diese Bescheinigung berechtigt zum Verkehr in folgenden Polizeibezirken der Grenzzone West:
Dette bevis gir innehaveren rett til å ferdes i følgende politidistrikter i Grensesone Vest:
Sarpsborg - Fredrikstad - Moss
Ort: Sted: Tune og Rolvsøy Lensmannskontor
Datum: Datum: 15/1-44
Siegel Stempel
Fotografiet stemples!
Birgit Holmen
Eigenhändige Unterschrift
Egenhendig underskrift
Lensmann Stromsæther
Unterschrift des Polizeidirektors bzw. Lensmanns
Politimesterens eller lensmannens underskrift

Fig. 5. 'Border dweller certificate' issued in 1944 to Birgit Holmen, born in Sarpsborg in 1928. The certificate entitled her to travel within the police districts of the towns of Sarpsborg, Fredrikstad, and Moss. Photo in private ownership.

Young Swedish men met young Norwegian women secretly on the Norwegian side of the border. They brought oral snuff, tobacco, and salt, commodities which were hard to get in Norway. These were swapped for Norwegian spirits. A Swedish man born in 1923 stated: "They had aquavit, right, you know that, that was their merchandise." It developed into a sport to avoid and trick the border police and the military on both sides of the border (Wigström 1996). There were scarcely any moral scruples among Norwegians, since the ban on cross-border contacts was issued by the German occupation forces and its puppet government led by Vidkun Quisling.

It carried the death sentence for a Norwegian to leave the country illegally. It could be done legally if a woman had gotten engaged to a Swedish man before the war. After being closely questioned by the Gestapo she was permitted to emigrate to Sweden in order to marry. A good number of Norwegian women came to Bohuslän this way during the war (Gustavsson 2017).

Swedes not only traded with Norwegian civilians but also with the German military. They had brought plenty of alcohol from Germany. They tried to make contact with Swedish civilians and also with Swedish soldiers at the border. The Germans wanted chocolate in exchange for alcohol. Several informants on the Swedish side have testified to taking part in this illegal exchange. This was a crime against the German authority to which the soldiers were supposed to be loyal. Therefore it had to take place secretly.

**Norwegian Purchases Across the Border Right After the Second World War**

During the time immediately after the Second World War, there was a serious shortage of many commodities in Norway. It was essential to be able to go to Sweden, crossing the border, to get your hands on the necessary staple goods.

There was considerable smuggling over the border in the late 1940s. Many women put on several layers of clothes and fabric when they passed the customs on bicycles. There were duties on all goods. Swedish customs officers turned a blind eye as they had done during the Second World War, to help Norwegians who needed to get a hold of bare necessities. On these shopping trips, the Norwegians were allowed to bring only a limited amount of money. On the way home they had to give a detailed account of how the money was used. The legal or home-distilled spirits that people had with them could be used as payment or in exchange. A Norwegian customs officer in Kornsjø, born in 1914, said that "they tried to sneak in a bottle of spirits that they had to trade with" (Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla).

Fig. 6. A Swede (left) and a Norwegian (right), both living on the border, meet and drink alcohol together in Vassbotten a short time after the Second World War. Photo Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla 53 671, 38.

When Swedish men in the border regions went to Norway right after the war, they continued the earlier tradition of creating contact with Norwegian women. There was a shortage of women on the Swedish side since many younger women had left the countryside and found work in cities in Sweden. The Swedish men were popular among the Norwegian women when they came in their cars since there was a shortage of cars in Norway.

The economic differences concerning living conditions in the two countries remained very severe and stayed so for several years after the war. The cultural contacts that had existed for many years, were further strengthened through the new mixed marriages.

Immigrant women from Norway who married into areas around the border have stated that "we experience no border (i.e. national border) here" (Bohuslän Museum, Uddevalla).

The next major shortage for Norwegians arose during the strikes at the Norwegian alcohol monopoly in 1978, 1982, and 1986. Then the flow of alcohol once again led to Norway. The difference from the prohibition years 1916–1927 was that on these occasions it was legal to import alcohol if one paid the customs clearance on any amount in excess of the duty-free quota. What was essential was getting hold of a luxury commodity that could not legally be obtained in Norway (Gustavsson 2019).

## The Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Norwegian/Swedish National Border

Another study investigates how the COVID-19 pandemic 2020–2022 affected the daily lives of individuals on both sides of the southern part of the Swedish-Norwegian border. Norway closed the border for entry on 17 March 2020. All Norwegian restrictions were lifted on 12 February 2022. The studied border area is unique in the 2000s, partly through extensive Norwegian border trade to Sweden, with a focus on large business centres located close to the border, and partly through significant tourism from Norway. Commuting, on the other hand, has primarily gone in the opposite direction from Sweden to Norway. Swedish females commuting on a daily or weekly basis are those working in healthcare occupations. The opening in 2015 of Kalnes Hospital, a regional hospital for Østfold county, had a great impact on work commuting.

The main sources for this investigation are reports from local newspapers near the border. They have published reports with interviews and photos featuring opinions from individuals.

Fig. 7. Physical close-down of the border passage to Norway on the old Svinesund bridge in January 2021. Photo: Marita Adamsson, StrömstadsTidning.

*The Various Phases of Infectivity*

A basis for the many border restrictions and their various phases during the pandemic were the various phases of infectivity. Their ups and downs replacing each other. Those were waves that were difficult to anticipate. Changes were followed in detail by the governments and Public Health Agencies of Norway and Sweden. Because of the short infectivity intervals, the Norwegian government could not predict how long the border should be closed, when it could possibly open up and to what extent. This caused significant insecurity but also irritation among borderers. It became almost impossible to make future plans for businesses as well as for groups and individuals.

*Norwegian Border Control Following Close-Down*

When Norway on 17 March 2020 closed the border for Norwegians to enter after being abroad, the goal was to prevent infectivity from abroad. Norwegians coming back from visiting places abroad had to be quarantined for fourteen days when coming back home. Anyone who was found breaking the quarantine regulations received a NOK 20,000 fine. If refusing to pay you could expect an indictment (ST 23 Jan 2021). On 8 May 2020, the quarantine time decreased from fourteen to ten days. The easing of the Norwegian border restrictions was primarily in the summer when infectivity was lower compared with the autumn, winter and spring.

One way of preventing the crossing of the border was using physical barriers. At minor passages, Norway stacked tyres in high piles. This way absolute close-down was accomplished (ST 2 Oct 2021). There was a large sign stating: "Entry prohibited www. polisen.se" (ST 11 Feb 2021).

The total close-down could not be done at the main passage on the new Svinesund bridge. There, freight traffic as well as daily commuters working in areas important to society were allowed to cross.

Beginning on 11 June 2021, fully vaccinated Norwegians, or those who had been infected with COVID-19 in the last six months, were exempt from quarantine when coming back home after travelling to Sweden. At the border, they had to show a coronavirus certificate and an entry schedule.

On 27 August 2021, the infectivity was up again and the Norwegian government decided to consider all of Sweden a red zone. This meant quarantine for all entries from Sweden by those not fully vaccinated or those who could show that they had been infected with Covid-19 during the last six months.

On 26 November 2021, Norway again intensified the entry restrictions for everyone over 16 years of age. All travellers to Norway had to register with the entrynorway.no. The reason was the soaring infectivity in Norway.

*Swedish Border Control Following Close-Down*

Unlike Norway, Sweden long opted not to close the border for entry. On 25 January 2021, also Sweden closed the main border passages on the new Svinesund bridge and in the Dalsland Nössemark. Minor passages were already closed by Norway. The reason for the border close-down for entry to Sweden was an increased spread of the contagious omicron variant. A new Swedish border close-down was instated on 28 December 2021 staying in effect until 21 January 2022. Only on the first day of the close-down, the Swedish police had to turn away 350 individuals coming from Norway. On 9 February 2022, all Swedish restrictions were lifted.

*Work Commuters*

In mid-September 2020, Norway imposed a rule that Swedish border commuters had to do a corona test, meaning that they would be nasal swabbed by a nurse every seventh day. After 17 March 2020, Norwegian work commuters with jobs in Sweden had to be quarantined when at home off work (ST 4 Feb 2020). When Norway lifted the restrictions for fully vaccinated Norwegians on 11 June 2021, this caused increased lines with increased problems both for Swedish and Norwegian daily commuters. When new Norwegian restrictions were imposed on 9 August 2021, unvaccinated Norwegian work commuters in Sweden again had to stay quarantined at home in Norway.

*Norwegian Tourists in Sweden*

From the 1990s onwards, more and more Norwegians from the Oslo region bought holiday homes in northern Bohuslän (Gustavsson 2013). When the border was closed on 17 March 2020, however, it was not possible to go to these houses by car or boat, since when the homeowners returned to Norway, they faced a quarantine. Norwegians were only allowed to visit and check on their holiday homes during the day but not to stay overnight in Sweden if they wanted to avoid quarantine.

The consequences of the lack of Norwegian tourists were felt in several areas in the Strömstad area. The guest harbour staff in Strömstad experienced this clearly during the summer of 2020. There were about 70 per cent fewer overnight harbour guests compared to the summer of 2019. Like the guest harbours, the campsites had a lower occupancy due to the lack of Norwegians. The financial loss was extensive, and this meant that staff had to be laid off.

Summer sports competitions between Norwegians and Swedes have been a tradition for many years. The field shooting competition Nolhotten, where almost half of the participants used to come from Norway, had to be cancelled at Easter 2020 for the first time in fifty years. The loss in the club coffers was big (ST 9 Apr 2020).

*Layoffs*

The Norwegian border closing on 17 March 2020 soon led to short-term layoffs on the Swedish side. In June 2020, it was reported that in Strömstad, unemployment had increased more than in any other municipality in the Västra Götaland region. By August 2020, around 1,500 employees in Strömstad stores had been laid off. Public boat traffic between Norway and Sweden was affected. The daily car ferry lines ColorLine and FjordLine, which operate on the Strömstad-Sandefjord route on the west side of the Oslofjord, had to suspend operations.

In that situation, some former employees started to have second thoughts about their future work situation. One way was to train for a profession that did not depend on the Norwegian border. This uncertainty was amplified by the fact that the timing of closures and openings was frequently changed without warning.

Something that could counteract layoffs was investment in e-commerce. In 2021, eight new e-commerce stores were opened in Strömstad. The investment in Norwegian customers made this possible (ST 14 May 2022).

*Border Meetings on the Old Svinesund Bridge*

When the national border was closed, people on both sides of the border could arrange meetings on the centre line of the old Svinesund bridge. These meetings included weddings, music events, family meetings, local politicians' meetings, journalist meetings, but also ordinary personal meetings. The middle-aged identical twins Pontus and Ola Berglund belonged to the last category. They met every Saturday from April 2020 until the end of the pandemic restrictions. Pontus lives in the Swedish border parish of Lommeland and Ola in the Norwegian border town of Halden, Norway. *Strömstads Tidning* has made several extensive reports with pictures and texts about the brothers' meetings.

The Strömstad choir Tontämjarna had difficulties when they could not meet their Norwegian choir leader Martin Rasten, because of the border closure. After a long break, the choir and its leader met in the middle of the old Svinesund Bridge on 18 May 2020. The choir director was on the Norwegian side and the choir was on the Swedish side. Martin Rasten stated that the choir "wanted to manifest the ties between Sweden and Norway."

*Negative Rumours Spread as a Result of the Closed Border*

When the border for entry into Norway was closed for a long period from 17 March 2020, frictions arose between residents on both sides of the border. It took the form of rumour-mongering. Journalist Marita Adamsson wrote in *Strömstads Tidning* on 10 October 2020 about "a strange blaming tactic where it sometimes sounds as if only Norwegians spread infection, sometimes as if only Swedes do. An unpleasant way to unload anxiety through attack." It became an "us and them thinking" (ST 10 Oct 2020).

Fig. 8. Twin brothers Pontus and Ola Berglund with each national flag in the middle of the old Svinesund bridge at Christmas time 2021. Photo: Arvid Brandström, StrömstadsTidning.

Fig. 9. The Norwegian Martin Rasten conducted Strömstad choir Tontämjarna in the middle of the old Svinesund bridge on 18 May 2020. Photo: Marita Adamsson, StrömstadsTidning.

On the Norwegian side of the border, there have been stories about negative statements about people on the other side of the border. A former municipal councillor in Halden stated in February 2021 that "the border closures have led to a lot of throwing shit at our neighbours in the east, and that makes me sad. I think it will take a lot of time to rebuild a good neighbourly relationship after this" (ST 20 Feb 2021).

*Vaccination*

The infection situation improved more and more in 2021 in line with increasing vaccinations on both sides. In Strömstad vaccination on a large scale started in nursing homes and in-home care in early January 2021. The vast majority of those in nursing homes accepted vaccines, although no one in Sweden can be forced to do so (ST 9 Jan and 16 Jan 2021). In September 2021, 82 per cent of the adult population over the age of 16 in Strömstad and 96 per cent of those over the age of 70 had received at least one dose (ST 7 Sep and 18 Sep 2021).

By comparison, three out of four Norwegians over the age of 18 had received at least one vaccine dose and 39 per cent had their second dose in July 2021 (ST 24 Jul 2021). Vaccination became especially important for Norwegians when, on 28 December 2021, Sweden started requiring vaccine certificates or negative COVID-19 tests, taken within the last 48 hours, for arrivals from the Nordic countries.

*Border Contacts After the Pandemic*

Sweden opened the border three days earlier than Norway, on 9 February 2022. However, special recommendations to avoid crowding and large crowds remained in place for the unvaccinated. Test results from the public health agency were not reported anymore. On 9 February ColorLine began operating the Strömstad-Sandefjord route. It was a struggle to find people for the ferry lines after a two-year hiatus. Restaurants had a lot of trouble finding qualified personnel. During the summer of 2022, the Norwegian tourist pressure became very strong. In the guest harbour in Strömstad, the Norwegian flags were flying again on the boats. Also, campsites in Strömstad could rejoice, seeing Norwegians return.

The new cross-border trade, border tourism and commuting to Norway contributed together to a marked drop in unemployment in 2022. At the same time, the increase in Norwegian border trade in Sweden after 12 February led to a decline in grocery trade in Norway. It had increased by about twenty per cent during the pandemic.

Politicians in Norway and Sweden have recognized that lessons for the future must be taken from the special difficulties that arose in border areas during the two-year pandemic. The study presented here can form the basis for further discussions on approaches and preparations to better cope with future crisis situations.

## Conclusions

What we learn from the related examples in this border study is that regional cultures are not hastily created and do not have to follow the national borders. One fundamentally separating condition is that the national government has been interested in controlling and regulating the contacts across the border, while the borderers rather have had a social and financial interest in being able to cross the border. Through smuggling and secret gatherings, it has been possible to evade national regulations. One may talk about a border region that develops gradually and that comprises both sides of the border, and where the solidarity might be clearly manifested in situations when the countries are separated on the national level. Regional contacts may actually constitute a uniting bond between the countries. It is relevant to talk about regional cultures around the border founded in social, cultural and ideological solidarity, connected to the border contacts that have existed.

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# NARRATIVE RECRAFTING: PERFORMING HEARTBREAK ON THE MUSEUM STAGE

Susanne Österlund-Pötzsch,[*] Hanne Pico Larsen[**]

> *Museum of Broken Relationships* (MBR) *is a physical and virtual public space created with the sole purpose of treasuring and sharing your heartbreak stories and symbolic possessions. It is a museum about you, about us, about the ways we love and lose.*

What do you do with personal belongings that hold deeply emotional memories, making them too meaningful to discard but too painful to keep? This was the burning question for the Croatian artists Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić after the breakup of their relationship. The lack of ritual after ending a relationship became a conundrum for the once couple. They wrote an essay about an imaginary museum of love and memory. Later, they applied for funding to make an installation to realise their vision and were thus able to launch their concept at a salon art exhibition in Zagreb in 2006. In 2010, they established the Museum of Broken Relationships (henceforth MBR), which soon became a visitor favourite and an award-winning museum with an immense appeal for people of all ages (MBR; Vištica and Grubišić 2017).

People still flock to both the museum in Zagreb and to its pop-up exhibitions worldwide. So far, the museum has had over 68 pop-up exhibitions in 30 different countries. The collections are continuously expanding through crowdsourcing, where people donate an object together with their story of a broken relationship. Museum scholar Lois H. Silverman (2009) has singled out the museum for elegantly creating a sensory environment full of symbolic objects and stories and thereby serving as a poster boy for museums delivering bereavement support to its visitors.

Born out of an art project, MBR has developed into a museum with a decisive grassroots profile. It is a museum about ordinary people, filled with everyday objects

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and stories written by anonymous contributors rather than by museum curators. The idea of community – as well as sharing – features prominently on the museum website and in the promotional material. As such, the museum comprises an intriguing array of genres and performative modes. Consequently, we find that folkloristic perspectives provide a helpful means of analysing and understanding the success and appeal of MBR. In an ongoing study, we focus on the performative interplay between narrativity and materiality in the context of MBR. In the present article, we share some preliminary findings and introduce the concept of 'narrative recrafting' (Larsen, Tillotson and Österlund-Pötzsch 2024). Narrative recrafting refers to the way in which people can actively reframe a significant object (or event) and hence take charge of the story in the face of a painful loss in their life. Here, we will look at a few examples of narrative recrafting on the museum stage but also discuss how a sense of community and sharing is maintained through conduits of feedback such as web platforms and museum guestbooks.

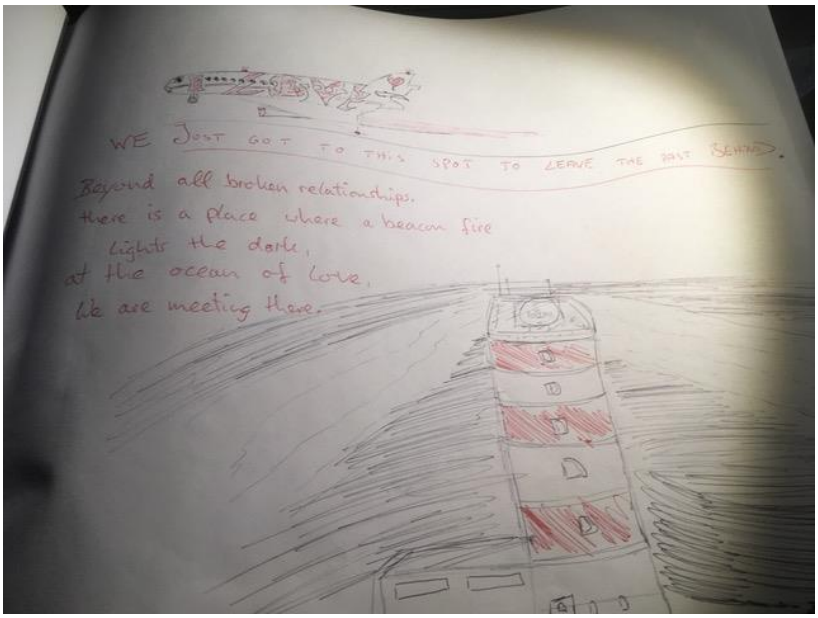

WE JUST GOT TO THIS SPOT TO LEAVE THE PAST BEHIND.
Beyond all broken relationships,
there is a place where a beacon fire
lights the dark,
at the ocean of love,
we are meeting there.

Figure 1. Drawing of a lighthouse in the guestbook by an anonymous guest. The text reads: "Beyond all broken relationships, there is a place where a beacon fire lights the dark, at the ocean of love, we are meeting there." Photo by Hanne Pico Larsen, Zagreb, Nov. 2018.

We visited the museum in Zagreb in 2018 and interviewed the people behind the museum. We also documented the 2017 pop-up exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark. Vištica and Grubišić (2017) have published a book featuring objects and stories from the collections. Moreover, the museum is active on various social media sites and is well-documented in the press. To be able to study how visitors evaluate their visits to the museum we have gathered both TripAdvisor, Google and X (formerly Twitter) reviews. The museum guestbooks have especially captured our attention. Our supposition is that

the guestbooks constitute performative spaces important for the sense of community formed in the wake of MBR.

MBR is a fascinating example of a new generation of museums facilitating interaction and creativity. However, in this article, we will focus on the aspects of storytelling and performance rather than placing MBR in a broader museological context.[1]

**Narrative Recrafting at the Museum of Broken Relationships**

A wedding dress stuffed down in a glass jar – it is not how we expect to see this very symbolically charged item of clothing. The explanation for this unusual treatment comes in the story. The previous wearer of the dress explains that after her marriage failed, she could neither throw the dress out nor give it to someone else. She comments: "I put it in this jar because I like recycling, but mostly I think it looks beautiful again taking on this new shape."

Figure 2. Vištica and Grubišić 2017, 10.

'The dress in the jar' is one example of an exhibit taken from the Museum of Broken Relationships. The donated item and story become joined, in effect forming a liaison to more fully convey the sensory, emotional and psychological reality of the broken relationship that links them. Both story and item have been 'recrafted' in order to make meaning out of the heartbreak. The objects found in the exhibition vary greatly. Very few have any monetary value – their worth lies in their connection with the narrative. Despite the everydayness of most of the objects, the museum frame imbues them with an artistic aura. As pointed out by the donor to the wedding dress in a jar – a glass container does lend an article a new aesthetic dimension. The connection between the objects and stories in the collection also varies. Sometimes the story focuses on the object, in other cases the object encapsulates the story.

[1] Our warm thanks to the editors of this volume and to the anonymous peer-reviewers.

What they have in common, however, is the pivotal encounter between the narrative and the object. Many items and stories in the museum depict broken romantic relationships, but there are also stories focusing on broken relationships with family members, with friends, and even with oneself. Relationships may wither over time, they may be cut short by war, illness, or other tragic major or minor life events. There is no end to the combinations of relationships and their endings. Nor does there seem to be an end to the creativity of narratives and donated items. As stated above, the objects tend to be rather quotidian in nature: a postcard, a stuffed animal, a key chain, a game of Monopoly or a bread toaster. Some donations have been manipulated, crushed, broken, cut into pieces, burned, melted and re-assembled in new ways, remerging as objects of art, as in the case of the wedding dress in a jar. However, in most cases, the recrafting lies in the frame given by the narrative, which sometimes turns the object into the protagonist in a story, and other times lets the object illustrate an event. While life does not always play out in the way we had envisioned, we still have power over the stories we tell about our broken hearts.

The foundation of many museums, and the *raison d'être* for MBR, is the entangled relationship between memory, story and object. Not only are they hard to disassociate from each other but, crucially, they invest in each other with import. The communicative potential of the triad hinges on the narrative aspect. In order to share and to turn personal experiences into something that can be communally perceived, we put things into words. As Susan Stewart reminds us, "Language gives form to our experience, providing through narrative a sense of closure and providing through abstraction an illusion of transcendence" (Stewart 1993, 13). The mini-narratives of MBR excel in boiling matters down to the bare bone. The stories are miniatures, seeking to finalise, showing a world in a nutshell (cf. ibid, xii). In the museum, decisive moments, as well as long complex processes, can be crystallised into a kernel represented by an item in a glass cage and a few pithy black lines on white paper.

Figure 3. Image from the MBR website.

According to Susan Sontag, "to tell a story is to say: this is the important story. It is to reduce the spread and simultaneity of everything to something linear, a path" (2007, 226). Storytelling is a powerful means of directing attention. Importantly, a story does not need to be long or elaborate to get a message across. A good example of this is one brief contribution to MBR, consisting of two sentences: "Mom left when I was 3. This is

one of the few Christmas gifts she has given me" (Bloomington, Indiana). The object – the old Christmas gift – is a small porcelain figurine of a larger frog to whose side a smaller frog is clinging.

The narrative, here, is a rather factual statement. The object – the porcelain frogs – is cute and somewhat kitschy. Nevertheless, combined with the succinct story, the figurine takes on a sad foreboding of the baby frog soon finding itself deserted by the mother frog. This type of narrative recrafting – that is, the joining of object and story – amplifies the message. In many cases, the recrafting takes the form of a tragic twist, a narrative frame that turns an object with generally positive connotations into a symbol of loss.

The narratives found in MBR's exhibitions are neither of the elite nor an anonymous 'people.' Although the contributors are nameless, the story is told from the perspective of an individual and conveys both singularity and a commonality of experience.

Personal stories and experiences need to have a level of intersubjectivity to compel (Bal 1994, 98). At MBR, the donors only represent themselves, but as most people have personal experiences of loss, visitors can likely identify with many stories found at the museum. The subject matter offers an additional appeal. Typically, the foundational story in museums revolves around the themes of progress and success. MBR deals with the human factor, not with glossy perfection but with things that did not go according to plan, and often points to the weaknesses and failures of human beings. Instead of holding up an ideal, we are met by real-life shortcomings – something that can feel is a relief in a world where, for many, heavily manicured social media is part of everyday life. On the other hand, social media as a form of expression is very much part of MBR. The website features an online version of the museum with the possibility to explore some of the exhibits. There is an easy share function to contribute a story or to simply pin a break-up onto a world map. If you are not ready to share, the museum website offers a vault to time-lock your memory: "Out of sight, out of mind." (MBR). Technology has not only diversified the way stories are told, but digital storytelling also seems to increase the element of the personal in storytelling (Wilson 2014, 135). The stories found at the MBR fit well into a social media format and its aesthetics. The texts tend to be short and written in plain, unadorned language, which is not to say that many of the texts are not poetic or emotionally powerful.

Figure 4. Image from the MBR website.

For example, a Twitter-esque entry from Manila, Philippines, paired with an object in the shape of a number simply states: "He had another woman. He couldn't make me his

number 1; I couldn't stand being his number 2." Two sentences and a steely silvery number two convey a painful process of hope, disappointment, pride, hurt and loss. The stark skeleton story provides us with enough material to flesh out the narrative and emotionally connect to it. This type of more or less decontextualised storytelling often follows the pattern of actors explaining their own or other's decisions and falls into what Boltanski and Thevenot labelled as "regimes of justification" (Illouz 2019).

In other cases, the narratives follow a more classic story arc with actors, time, space, events, several episodes and a concluding evaluation or twist. A blinking dog collar light from Berlin, Germany, comes with the following story:

> We had been married for thirteen years and were living in a foreign country together. The love in our relationship had taken a backseat to friendship and I´d come to realize I was miserable. Telling her I was leaving was the hardest thing I'd ever done - at that time anyway. She went back to her own country to stay with her family and took our little dog, which I thought she would need more than I did. She sent me a package with a few small things, each of which broke my heart. Most were about her wanting to take care of me, even though she was the one suffering more.
> The little red light has travelled with me everywhere, in my toiletries bag for two years now, killing me every time I see it. It is a dog-collar light she bought for our dog, who kept wandering off in the dark winter nights and getting lost. This way, we could always find her. My former partner took her own life a little over a year after we split up. Alone. In a hotel room. In a strange town. I am still alive, but...
> P.S. Please hang it blinking if you use it in the museum – it reminds me of a heartbeat. The battery can be replaced.

The story, relating two intertwined broken relationships, a breakup and a suicide, is told from the perspective of the person who would normally be the 'villain' of the story – the one who broke up the relationship. Still, the focus in the story lies on the partner who was abandoned, and we are presented with scenes depicting her thoughtful nature: sending a care package to her ex-partner, and procuring a flashing light for their straying dog. The exhibition object – the dog collar light – takes on a deeply symbolic significance. The woman caring about others is not saved by a blinking light but is lost in the darkness forever. However, the person who tells us the story is not unscathed.

Figure 5. Vištica and Grubišić 2017, 217.

The breakup was "the hardest thing" they had done, the care package "broke their heart," seeing the little red light "was killing them" and they end their story by noting that they are still alive "but…". The post-scriptum to the story adds an interesting instruction. The museum is asked, if the item is displayed, to keep the light blinking as it brings to mind the beating of a heart. The comment demonstrates the contributor's awareness of the performative effect of the accompanying object and the enmeshment of the object and story, something we will address in the following section. The final sentence provides a concluding twist. "The battery can be replaced" could be a casual and pragmatic remark, but in a narrative recrafting frame it could equally be a sombre reminder that some batteries cannot be replaced.

**Relics and Performance**

Objects in a museum collection are no longer 'mere' objects. In being put on display paired with a story, they gain a value that makes it worth people's while to visit the exhibition, contemplate them and, possibly, even be moved by them. As noted by Terry Gunnell (2010, 7), a museum can, similarly to a stage set, communicate and perform for audiences. In order to frame this new performative status of the objects donated to MBR, we refer to them as *relics*. The term 'relic,' from the Latin *reliquiae*, implies something left behind or something that remains, such as an object or a custom. In Roman Catholic Christendom, 'relic' refers to a body part or memorial associated with a saint. Relics in the religious sense not only have affective value but are also believed to have real healing power. A further and wider use of the term is as something old that is possibly kept for emotional reasons. (Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus). We suggest that aspects of all of these uses clarify the role and function of objects donated to MBR. Relics in the secular sense can be understood both as phenomena that might have been expected to have disappeared and as phenomena connected with a cherished memory. Robyn Malo, writing about relics in Late Medieval England, argues that language and discourse played a decisive role in the construction of the meaning of relics. She points out that the reliquary, the box containing the holy remains, has been, and can be, compared to language. For many religious authorities, the relic and the reliquary are perceived as a single item (Malo 2013, 6–9). The relic can thus in many respects be regarded as "an empty signifier, its meanings produced, in some sense, by narrative" (ibid, 11).

The processes of translating a sacred relic and creating a museum display at MBR are obviously far from identical. However, the interpretive framework for reading relics (ibid, 7) has important similarities to the framework provided by MBR for reading the items on display. Moreover, we suggest that the accompanying narrative for the museum object may act in a similar way to the reliquary holding the relic.

The poetic language of the reliquary has a performative power (Chaganti 2008), as does the narrative framing the museum object.

A plain-looking iron in one of the exhibition cases at MBR is paired with the concise text, "This iron was used to iron my wedding suit. Now it is the only thing left."

Figure 6. Vištica and Grubišić 2017, 69.

The text is hyper-efficient in its terseness. We get the essential information: there was a love relationship, but it is no longer. A narrative emerges with a timespan, a dramatic arc and an ironic twist. The initial *mise-en-scéne* gives us an expectant, perhaps nervous, groom who stands and irons his shirt in preparation for his wedding, a day associated with 'happily ever after' and a future of togetherness. The concluding part of the mini-narrative abruptly shatters the illusion.

As in many of the MBR exhibits, the chosen objects may seem arbitrary. However, the performance created in the tension between the object and the narrative – the relic and the reliquary – is far more powerful than any detailed factual description of how the couple met, their decision to get married, the many years of everyday rut that broke down the marriage and so on. Putting the iron centre stage is skilful casting by the teller of the story: an everyday object plays a key role in a decisive event, but it is now a remnant, a relic, and the 'only thing' left from a happier past.

In its relic-like state, the museum item becomes akin to a mask, in the sense of an object a person puts in front of themselves as a representation (see Gunnell 2007, 29). As such, the MBR exhibits fit Richard Bauman's definition of a folklore performance as an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication that is framed in a special way and put on display for an audience (Bauman 1992, 41). However, performance can be understood as extending beyond the medium of text and as being multimodal as well as multisensory (Gunnell 2010, 5–6). Consequently, different types of performative contexts establish their own types of performative spaces, and, within these spaces, their own forms of 'heightened' reality (Gunnell and Ronström 2013, 21, 27).

The breakup stories displayed at MBR sometimes challenge what has traditionally been perceived as constituting a narrative. For example, one contribution consists of a diamond ring and two words: "S(HE) BE(LIE)VE(D)." Through the artistic use of brackets, the text opens two juxtaposing sentences: "She believed" – "He lied." This commanding narrative recrafting is not only suggestive of a classic storyline for a

tragedy but is also a stellar example of how the agency of a symbolically charged relic can actively influence our interpretation.

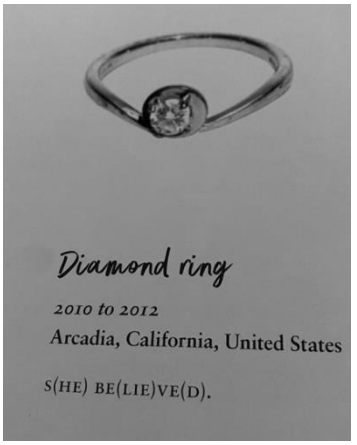



Figure 6. Vištica and Grubišić 2017, 142.

Importantly, the communicative act of performance is perceived and experienced differently by different audiences (Gunnell 2010, 5). Regardless of how carefully a museum display tries to steer the perception and attention of its audience, visiting a museum is a creative process at its core. Viewing exhibitions is a personal act in which the museum visitor makes use of suggested interpretations but also makes interpretations of their own (Pearce 1994, 26). Here, the 'grassroots' aspect of MBR comes to the fore, as there are several venues for interaction, feedback and creative responses offered to museum visitors.

**Community and Feedback**

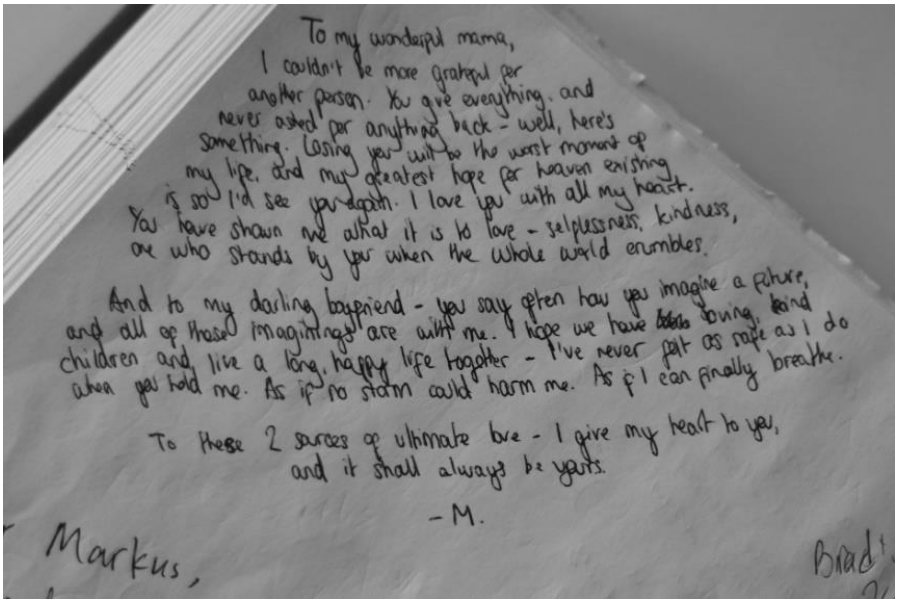
Despite the brick-and-mortar museum in Zagreb, MBR can be perceived as a global venture. The multiple pop-up exhibitions worldwide, collaborations with various institutions, as well as online presence combine many voices in one – finding common ground in passion and love, loss and moving on. Curious to hear the voices of its visitors, we stumbled upon the guestbooks, which are prominently featured in the MBR exhibitions. Initially looking for evaluations of the museum experience, we found the guestbooks to be a fascinating new addition to the rich material contained in the museum displays. The pages of the guestbooks, or the "books of confessions," as the museum calls them, add yet another layer of testimonies to the apparent universality of heartbreak. The 'confessionals' have come to constitute an integral part of the exhibition and the museum ritual (private correspondence with curator Charlotte Fuentes 5 June 2024). Comments in many languages include declarations of love, warnings about relationships and love, and guidance, as well as the more traditional guestbook notations. On page after page, visitors leave their own contributions, sharing a burden or perhaps marking a new beginning while passing through on their onward journey to

overcome their loss. This ritual of connecting with other 'passers-bys' finds a parallel in the pilgrim practice of leaving anonymous imprints of presence by adding one's own stone to the stone piles found along the pilgrimage route (Peelen and Jansen 2007, 83). By visibly and tangibly contributing, may it be a stone or a story, one virtually becomes part of a group. By leaving a marking in a book the person enters a performative space – these anonymous unstructured, graffiti-like utterances can be interpreted as performative statements or ritualistic inscriptions on a symbolic site (Magliacani, Madeo and Cerchiello 2018). It is the fulfilment of the, mostly nameless, visitors chiming in on the sharedness of the experience with an "I was here too" tagline and thereby joining a particular narrative community (Noy 2007; 2009).

The guestbooks contain a wide range of reactions expressed in a multitude of genres. From doodles to breakup stories, from heartfelt poetry to single stark statements such as "The older I get, the more I realise I don't like my father." The guestbooks are as eclectic, sincere, banal and profound as the museum's exhibitions. Not all confessions are stories of heartbreak. Many guestbook contributors have clearly been moved by the exhibitions and contemplate their own situation with thankfulness, as this letter of gratitude directed to the writer's mother and partner:

> To my wonderful mama, I couldn't be more grateful for another person. You give everything, and never ask for anything back - well, here´s something. Losing you will be the worst moment of my life, and my greatest hope for heaven existing so I´d see you again. I love you with all my heart. You have shown me what it is to love - selflessness, kindness, one who stands by you when the whole world crumbles.
> And to my darling boyfriend - you say often how you imagine a future, and all of those imaginings are with me. I hope we have loving kind children and live a long happy life together – I never felt as safe as I do when you hold me. As if no storm [?] could harm me. As if I can finally breathe.
> To these 2 sources of ultimate love – I give my heart to you, and it shall always be yours.
> *– M*

The museum's decision to include the guestbooks as part of the exhibition can be seen as an act of levelling and breaking down the customary border between displays and visitors. Here, the visitors are producing content for the museum that has not been curated. The pages of the guestbooks are messy mosaics of messages. The contributors have written or drawn in all corners, in various angles, and in handwriting of different sizes, styles, colours and languages. This diverse community might be transient and random, but is no less compelling, as evidenced by the massive number of responses the museum gathers on forums such as TripAdvisor. As pointed out by Gunnell, in performance the communicator and the receiver do not need to be physically at the site, indeed "the word 'perform' underlines precisely this shared act of communication in which a set of signals is sent out and then received, triggering a chain of other influences" (Gunnell 2010, 8). The stories featured in the exhibition encourage visitors to write their own confessions, and to share their innermost feelings in the provided guestbooks. The community of broken hearts is inclusive and grows ever larger.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To these 2 sources of ultimate love - I give my heart to you,
and it shall always be yours.
- M.
Markus,
Brad

Figure 8. Scan from the guestbook, no date.

**Conclusion: "The story is your stage"**

Breaking up, Olinka Vištica and Dražen Grubišić, felt the lack of a ritual providing closure to their life together. – And what to do with that wind-up toy that had been part of a private joke and routine of showing affection? Instead of ending up in the trash, the toy rabbit and its story became the foundation of the Museum of Broken Relationships.

The awareness of the importance of ritual action is evident in the museum's call for contributions, proposing donation as a creative and empowering response to heartache: "Wish to unburden the emotional load by erasing everything that reminds you of that painful experience? Don't – one day you may regret it. Instead, send your item to our Museum and take part in the creation of a collective emotional history!" (MBR). The collection campaigns do not solely focus on individual breakups but also reflect global events. The call for contributions to the pop-up in York, UK, gets some extra spice from Brexit: "Just as Britain is set to break up with the European Union, York Castle Museum brings a collection of stories and symbolic possessions to the city which relate the ways we love and lose." In March 2020, MBR invited the sharing of lockdown stories (MBR, 11 Jan 2019 and 27 Mar 2020).

Despite the open calls and the emphasis on personal expressivity, it is important to remember that MBR is also a museum with carefully curated exhibitions. The MBR donation form specifies that objects and stories will be safeguarded, but they do not promise that the objects and stories will go on display. While the stories are not edited, there is a process of selection. Still, people from all over the world donate. The museum can be perceived as an archive for narratives and items charged with multiple meanings of loss and love, whereof some are invited to enter the performative space, while others are waiting backstage in the museum's storage.

In our ongoing study of MBR, we continue to probe the tensions as well as the interplay between relic and narrative, the individual story and the museum frame, the single exhibit and the network of items on display. From our early analysis, the concept of narrative recrafting emerged as a useful tool to explore the process of creativity and performativity that takes place in the act of sharing heartbreak on the museum stage. Next, we are eager to involve the genres of guestbooks and travel sites in our analysis of narrative and performance. However, for now, we take a bow and give MBR the concluding words with their invitation to join the performance: *Be frank, withdrawn, furious, imaginative, witty or sad. Through your story you create the museum display – the story is your stage*. (MBR, https://brokenships.com/?open=faq).

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# ON THE RELATIONS OF TRUTH AND HUMOR

Elliott Oring*

*How many musician jokes are there?*
*Just one—all the rest are true.*

Exploring the relationship between humor and truth might seem a fruitless exercise. After all, jokes, unlike legends, do not seem to require the entertainment of truth in order to do their work. For example,

> Two atoms are flying through space. One says to the other,
> "I think I just lost an electron."
> The other says, "Are you sure?"
> And first responds, "I'm positive."

What is required to 'get' this joke is the recognition of an appropriate incongruity. What is incongruous is that the claim of certainty about having lost an electron turns out to be the very evidence of that claim. The incongruity is appropriate because 'I'm positive' means 'I'm certain,' but it also describes something that is positively charged, and an atom that has lost an electron would have an overall positive charge. This appropriateness is spurious, however—as is the case with most jokes based on puns—because we do not allow words or phrases within the same utterance to legitimately carry entirely different meanings.

There is nothing in this joke that we would likely describe as 'true.' Atoms do not talk to one another or even to themselves. Perhaps the only thing that we might regard as true lies outside the joke—that bit of chemical knowledge that atoms stripped of electrons are left with a positive charge. There is nothing surprising in all of this. Jokes often depend on scenarios that are extremely unlikely if not impossible: talking

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penguins (Adams and Newell 1994, 202; Keillor 2005, 311), sparrows copulating with elephants (Mr. J. n.d., 12), skeletons walking into bars (Keillor 2005, 129), Moses and Jesus playing golf (*You've Got Jokes* 2009, 172), a horse diagnosing engine trouble in a stalled motor vehicle (Edwards 1993, 46). Some jokes, such as riddle jokes—How do you tell if a Wagnerian soprano is dead? (Keillor 2005, 214)—may not make use of a scenario at all. Still other jokes are patently absurd and bear no relation to reality: "How do you hide an elephant in a cherry tree?" or "What is green, weighs 5000 tons, and lives on the bottom of the sea?"[1] Although such jokes would seem to escape normal realities and conventional schemes of thought, they nevertheless are rooted in the perception of spuriously appropriate incongruities that lead to their recognition as jokes (see Oring 2003, 46–71).

> A juggler, driving to his next performance, is stopped by the police.
> "What are those knives doing in your car?" asks the policeman?
> "I juggle them in my act," says the juggler.
> "Oh yeah?" says the cop. "Let's see you do it."
> So the juggler starts tossing and juggling the knives.
> A guy driving by sees this and says, "Wow, am I glad I gave up drinking. Look at the tests they are making you do now."
> (Keillor 2005, 197)

This joke, in order to be recognized as a joke, requires (1) grasping the incongruity of the passing motorist regarding knife juggling as some kind of sobriety test, (2) regarding knife juggling as somewhat appropriate since roadside sobriety tests often require demonstrations of physical coordination (e.g., walking a straight line toe-to-heel or touching one's nose with eyes closed), and (3) recognition of the utter spuriousness of this test since even the most sober individuals in a population, including the police themselves, would not be able to perform the act successfully.

In other words, recognizing the spuriousness of what makes the act appropriate demands an assessment on the part of the joke audience of what is likely to be true of a genuine sobriety test. This is different from the joke about the atoms. In that joke the audience registers that atoms do not speak—let alone speak English—to one another. But that joke's humor does not depend on that apprehension. In the joke about the sobriety test, the humor *hinges* on being able to distinguish what is conceptually appropriate to a sobriety test—i.e., an act of physical dexterity—and what is true of a real sobriety test. Juggling knives far exceeds the physical coordination necessary to demonstrate sobriety. Thus, it can be said that getting this joke depends on the ability to distinguish what is true from what is false. Juggling knives does not correspond to a plausible test of sobriety in reality.

[1] "How do you tell if a Wagnerian soprano is dead?—The horse is relieved"; "How do you hide an elephant in a cherry tree?—You paint its toenails red"; "What is green, weighs 5000 tons and lives on the bottom of the sea?—Moby Pickle."

> A farmer in western Kansas put a tin roof on his barn. Then a tornado blew the roof off, and when the farmer found it in the next county, it was twisted and mangled beyond repair.
>
> A friend of his advised him that the Ford Motor Company would pay him a price for his scrap tin, and the farmer decided he would ship the roof up to the company and see how much he could get for it. He crated it up in a big wooden box and sent it off to Michigan marking it plainly with his return address so that the Ford Company would know where to send the check.
>
> Weeks passed, and the farmer didn't hear from the Ford Company. Finally, he was just on the verge of writing them to find out what was the matter, when he received a letter from them. It said, "We don't know what hit your car, mister, but we'll have it fixed for you by the fifteenth of next month." (Botkin 1957, 103)[2]

It is clearly incongruous that a crumpled tin roof could be mistaken for a demolished Ford automobile. But the mistake is somewhat appropriate as early model Ford cars had thin metal skins (they were often called "Tin Lizzies" although made of a thin but durable steel alloy), and a car that had been in a major crash might superficially resemble a severely crumpled tin roof. But that appropriateness is spurious because it is not true that a demolished automobile could actually be mistaken for a tin roof. Cars were not made of tin, and the wreck of a car would have included glass, a steering column, seats, tires, headlights, axels, a drive shaft, and an engine. It could not be possible that a motor company could mistake a tin roof for a crashed automobile let alone offer to restore it. So again, we have an appropriate incongruity that is spurious because it does not accord with what is held to be true about the real world.

It is important to reiterate the difference between the joke about the two atoms and the jokes about the sobriety test and the tin roof. While the audience for the joke about the atoms recognizes the impossibility of two atoms talking to one another, its humor does not hinge on that recognition. The recognition of that untruth is not what makes that text identifiable as a joke. The jokes about the sobriety test and the tin roof, however, can only be perceived as jokes if the audience can distinguish the truth and untruth of the means by which their incongruities are made appropriate; only if they can discern why juggling daggers could not be part of a sobriety test and why a crumpled tin roof could never be truly mistaken for the wreckage of an automobile.

Does any of this really matter? Is this merely the noting of a distinction without a difference? I think there is an important difference, but before I make that case, I would like to turn briefly to some examples of humor that are not formally jokes (Oring 1992, 82–83) but in which the recognition of truth would seem to play a pivotal part.

What follows are a few instances of computer-generated humor. The generative program is rather simple, and the humor is produced by brute force rather than through any deep insight into the nature of humor. The humor is generated by a Twitter bot (a program that performs some repetitive tasks online) that attaches the subject of one newspaper headline with the verb and object of another. For example, "Miss Universe Attacks Northern Nigerian City: Dozens Killed," or "Khloé Kardashian accused of

[2] Botkin received this joke in 1957 from Samuel J. Sackett, professor of English and a folklorist at Fort Hays Kansas State College (Botkin 1957, 292).

'selling off' India's national monuments." The humor of these examples—admittedly weak—depends upon the perception of these headlines as incongruous: Miss Universe never did attack nor could she attack any country (although Boko Haram did), and Khloé Kardashian would be in no position to sell India's monuments (although India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed over the Red Fort in Dehli to a private company). The appropriateness of these mock headlines depends upon their possession of the content, style, and concision of news headlines, but this appropriateness can often be identified as spurious and consequently humorous—as in the above examples—because the headlines appear so unlikely to be true. Furthermore, these efforts at computer-generated humor are sought out from a website by individuals who generally know how they have been generated. They know that the headlines are mashups and not legitimate news headlines which ensures they are perceived as spurious. While the bot can and does generate some amusing combinations, many are produced that are simply puzzling: "How will US withdrawal from Windows 10 nuclear deal influence Iraq?" or "Celtics pummel Cavs, Warriors-boss key production is here, and second-round exit interviews." That is to say, they are incongruous, but there is no appropriateness. Others so closely approximate real news—"White Sox chief lobbyist out after hiring Trump attorney, Cohen"; "LGTV gets the Home Depot voice control"; "Why it matters what shape artificial intelligence's finances are in"—that they do not appear to be either incongruous or spurious and consequently do not register as funny at all. They look as though they might be legitimate, if slightly odd, headlines (Veale 2021, 52–53; "Two Headlines" 2018).

Leaving behind the computer-generated headline mashups, it is instructive to examine an instance of a political slogan. It is instructive because there is no agreement on the truth of the proposition. The slogan, "Guns don't kill people, people kill people," was first promulgated by the National Rifle Association of America back in 1911 when gun control legislation was passed in New York State. It reemerged as a bumper sticker in the 1970s ("Guns Don't Kill" 2024). Whether this is funny or serious depends upon how the proposition is evaluated. For most gun-rights advocates, the root causes of the high rate of death wrought by guns in the U.S. is due to criminals, the mentally deranged, and human carelessness, not the easy availability and possession of firearms. Firearms are merely tools, not agents. For them, the slogan reflects a basic truth: deal with the agents, not the tool. For those who support gun control, however, the slogan is likely to be perceived as something of a joke. The incongruity is that most homicides and suicides in the United States are brought about by people using guns. The appropriateness of the slogan's incongruity is that people must indeed wield such weapons for death and injury to result. That appropriateness is spurious, however, because countries that severely control firearm possession, like the United Kingdom and Japan, have far, far fewer homicides per capita than the United States ("List of Countries" 2024).[3] For the proponents of anti-gun legislation, the slogan seems a joke because the claim that people kill people without an acknowledgement that guns are a large part of the equation does not register as true. That people kill people is

[3] Of course, there are countries with far higher gun death rates per capita than the U.S.

appropriate—ultimately someone must pull the trigger—but that appropriateness is spurious. The availability and widespread possession of firearms is seen as *the* significant factor.

That the perception of jokes may depend upon matters of truth has theoretical implications. There have been attempts to identify some of the means by which language and behavior are turned into jokes. In 1905, Sigmund Freud wrote of the *techniques* of jokes in the first chapter of his *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, and that discussion took up thirty percent of that famous treatise. Freud's discussion is intelligent and thought provoking, and he moves through a variety of joke analyses eventually to arrive at a set of more generalized techniques: condensation (Freud 1960, 41–42), unification (39–40), displacement, (49–51), faulty reasoning (58–60), and indirect representation (74–75). Incidentally, Freud did not recognize incongruity as a governing principle of jokes. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Freud's exploration of joke techniques that is relevant to this discussion is that on a number of occasions, he is uncertain as to whether a joke is utilizing one technique or another (e.g., 53–54, 55, 71–73). Furthermore, at times he recognizes the relevance of assessing truth.[4] Ultimately, Freud concludes that the general techniques he identifies are congruent with those that he previously identified operating in dreams (88), although one cannot help but suspect that his previous analysis of dreams overly determined his analysis of jokes.[5] The central point, however, is that Freud seemed to recognize that identifying the construction of a joke is not a straightforward affair. Techniques are not always distinct and cannot simply be assigned to discrete parts of the text.

Some computational linguists have also been interested in the means by which jokes are constructed. Working from what they call the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin 1991), they distinguish six components of a joke, two of which are relevant to this discussion: *script opposition* and *logical mechanism*. In a nutshell, script opposition is analogous—but by no means identical—to what I have called *incongruity*, and the logical mechanism is the technical means by which, in their formulation, two scripts are made compatible so that an opposition is resolved, or in my terminology, an incongruity is made appropriate. These linguists have put forward a list of some 27 logical mechanisms which, for example, include juxtaposition, role reversal, coincidence, faulty reasoning, false analogy, false premise, and cratylism—this last being an unnecessarily exotic word for a pun (Attardo, Hempelmann, and Di Maio 2002,

[4] This is related to the making of overstatements which Freud regards as instances of irony rather than as jokes proper (Freud 1960, 73).

[5] The problem with Freud's claim of congruence between the means by which dreams and jokes are generated is that there is no way to demonstrate that the techniques posited for dreams are, in fact, operating. The techniques of dreams are invisible. Freud uses these techniques to arrive at the meaning of a dream. If the techniques are incorrect, the interpretation of the dream is as well. If the interpretation is incorrect (although there is no straightforward method of ascertaining whether an interpretation of a dream is incorrect), the techniques must likewise be incorrect. In jokes, however, the point of the joke is relatively explicit. People 'get' the joke. It is then possible to identify the means by which the amusement is generated.

18).[6] There is no time to reprise my previous criticisms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor or the notion of logical mechanism (Oring 2011a; 2019). I will merely state that their list of mechanisms is incomplete (e.g., Oring 2023, 83–84), the mechanisms that they identify are not well defined, and particular mechanisms that they have identified may not resolve incongruities but create them. *Juxtaposition*, for example, one of the mechanisms on their list, is what usually creates an incongruity rather than what makes it appropriate or "resolves" it. One of their own examples of juxtaposition is The Gobi Desert Canoe Club T-shirt (Attardo and Raskin 1991, 307). These linguists see the resolution of the incongruity of a canoe club in the Gobi Desert as simply a matter of the two ideas being put next to one another—being juxtaposed on the shirt. Juxtaposition, however, is what creates the incongruity, or in their terms, the opposition; it does not make the incongruity appropriate or that opposition compatible. What makes the incongruity appropriate is that the name on the shirt mirrors a host of T-shirts that conjoin a geographical location with an association of sport or leisure-activity enthusiasts such as the Los Angeles Golf Club, the Casablanca Tennis Club, the Wisconsin Curling Team, or the Molokai Canoe Club. That appropriateness is spurious because no one is likely to believe that a canoe club in the Gobi Desert really exists, that is, that the T-shirt designates a genuine sporting association.[7] That is how the humor—admittedly weak in this example—is created and why it is perceived.

It is misleading to speak of jokes in terms of logical mechanisms because what makes a joke appropriate is never logical nor is it a mechanism. Jokes are not like watches whose parts are differentiated with discrete functions which interact to produce amusement (Oring 2011b, 151). The recognition of a truth or untruth, which I have shown to be an essential element in the perception of some jokes, cannot in any way be construed as a mechanism. It is not something visible in a joke text like a pun, a syntactic reversal, or an analogy. The assessment of a truth is not a feature of a text, but a sensibility brought to a text by a joke listener. Truth has no particular location within a joke.

A last example:

> Q: Why are married women heavier than single women?
> A: Single women come home, see what's in the fridge and go to bed. Married women come home, see what's in the bed and go to the fridge.
> (Hempelmann and Attardo 2011, 142)

That a difference between single and married women can be captured in a relation between a bed and a kitchen appliance would seem to be the core incongruity in this joke. The initial question about a difference in weight is something of a red herring as the entirety of the joke is really contained within the answer. In fact, the joke would

[6] *Cratylism* is Salvatore Attardo's term and is derived from Plato's dialogue *Cratylus* which explores the nature of language and its relationship to reality. The pun, for me, comes closest to a technical mechanism that is (almost) distinctively dedicated to the creation of jokes.

[7] The Gobi Desert Canoe Club is the name of a music band, and they did produce a T-shirt.

remain were the question simply recast as, "What is the difference between single and married women?" The appropriateness would seem to lie in two characteristics: (1) that the incongruity can be expressed in a single linguistic formula that differs only in whether the movement is away from the refrigerator toward the bed or vice versa. (2) The joke expresses a seeming truth: single women come home after a day at work to an empty apartment, find little appetizing to eat, possibly because no one has shopped or cooked for them, and seek solace in sleep. The married women, on the other hand, have likely tired of their husbands so that they no longer find them attractive partners in bed and seek solace in food. The appropriateness is spurious because the truth expressed is recognizable as a mere caricature. Not all married women lose interest in their husbands (nor do many come home to find their husbands already in bed). Not all single women come home to eat, and when they do, they might cook for themselves or order out. The joke has a certain truthiness, but it is clearly not the truth.

If you have followed the argument that (1) jokes depend upon an incongruity that (2) is made appropriate that (3) is somehow spurious, i.e., faulty or illegitimate, and (4) that the assessment of truth may be critical to the recognition of that spuriousness, then you should conclude that a computer designed to identify texts as jokes (on other than on merely stylistic grounds) will need to be able to assess the truth or untruth of various representations in a joke text. Truth judgments will have to be part of the process. The focus of computational linguists on the creation of ontologies—i.e, integrated encyclopedias of semantic knowledge (Raskin 2008, 7–12)—and the computation of the semantic distance, relatedness, or antonymy of words or concepts (Milhacea and Strapparava 2005, 534) in the effort to identify incongruity and appropriateness will not prove sufficient unless truth is one of the properties of the semantic categories. Even if that were possible,[8] the machine would still have to be able to distinguish those truth assessments that are irrelevant to a joke's construction—such as, two atoms talking to one another—and those that are critical to joke construction—that juggling knives could be a component of a sobriety test, that a tin roof could be mistaken for a wrecked Model T, that attraction to the refrigerator versus the bed effectively discriminates between single and married women.

There is more to say about truth and humor. Here the focus has been on only one kind of truth, the correspondence theory of truth which holds a statement to be true when it corresponds to some reality, as when the statement "It is snowing outside" is true when it is actually snowing outside the window. There are other theories of truth as well, some of which have relevance to a discussion of jokes. But that discussion must be adjourned to another time.

[8] Consider, for example, that knife juggling is a genuine skill. It is only unreal in the conduct of a police sobriety test. Truth, therefore, would also have to be reckoned contextually.

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# SACRED SPACES IN-BETWEEN SERIOUSNESS AND FUN: A COMMENT ON THE MARCOLF-TRADITION

Pernille Hermann*

Terry Gunnell's research has shown that spaces and human beings interact in a double process where spaces influence people and people influence spaces (e.g. Gunnell 2006). Spaces never just *are*, they always mean something or do something to people. This becomes especially clear in sacred spaces where human beings act according to belief systems or mythologies and where a location or a delineated space can acquire symbolic meaning.[1] Sacred spaces are most often connected to gravity and seriousness. Play and playfulness, nevertheless, are sometimes integrated into such so-called serious spaces. This is the case in the Swedish Husby-Sjutolft parish church in Uppland, where a painting of the trickster figure Marcolf (Fig. 1) is found among prominent biblical figures and motifs.

At the core of the Marcolf-tradition lies the story of a meeting in Jerusalem of two rather extreme opposites, the intellectual king, Solomon, and the streetwise farmer, Marcolf. They engage in a lively dispute and the farmer systematically challenges Solomon's ideals and brings the conversation down to a low level. Quite often he comments on the biblical king's wise words with reference to rural life and scatological behavior. Marcolf's preference for the material world brings about sarcasm, irony, and laughter. This is the case, for instance, when Solomon says: "All paths will often lead to the main road" and Marcolf responds that "[a]ll veins run to a fat intestine" or when Solomon's words: "You shall punish the taunter, so that you are not taunted by him" are met with the response that, "[t]he more one disturbs a turd, the more it smells" (Mitchell and Hermann 2022, 247–48).

In the sacred space of the church ritual performances are carried out and the architecture and the interior decoration, like the murals, can be expected to support the

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[1] Here the term 'sacred space' covers a place that is considered holy and serves as a site of worship or rituals. A wide range of buildings, locations, and sites in the landscape can be considered as sacred. In this article I use the Christian church as an example of a sacred space.

mythologies or dogmas that explain the rituals. One can then be surprised by the fact that Marcolf – a figure who subverts and makes fun of an authority from the Holy Bible and thereby questions the worldview of this authority – is painted on the walls of the church in the first place. How does it happen that this blunt figure is found in the middle of the epitome of a sacred place? In this article, using the painting of Marcolf as my main example, I will bring the sacred space of the church and playfulness together and point out that ritual spaces and spaces of play are not completely contradictory.

Figure 1. The painting of Marcolf (1480–1500) in the Husby-Sjutolft parish church. Photo: Stephen Mitchell.

Terry Gunnell has dealt with such discussion and has shown that the border between ritual and play is not always clear-cut (Gunnell 2008, 24–92), a discussion that has also been taken up in a recent study where it is argued that ritual and play are not opposites but rather belong to a continuum (Kjus 2023, 19–28). This realisation was made already in the seminal work of Johan Huizinga, who made a point of the fact that sites that otherwise qualify as serious can be defined as 'playgrounds,' which – according to him – is a very broad category. Playgrounds can basically be found everywhere as long as certain play-characteristics are present, which is the case when rules are followed and when the activity in question is delineated from everyday doings. Huizinga notes:

> The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc. are all in form and function playgrounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. (Huizinga 2016, 10)

This definition must be seen in connection with the importance that Huizinga ascribes to the activity of play, which he argues is placed centrally in all cultures:

> In culture we find play as a given magnitude before culture itself existed, accompanying it and pervading it from the earliest beginnings to the phase of civilization we are now living in. We find play present everywhere as a well-defined quality of action. (Huizinga 1949, 4)

According to this understanding, sites that, as history continues, become serious institutions will have retained dimensions of play.

Churches can be added to Huizinga's list of so-called 'playgrounds,' not only does a church space live up to the two play-characteristics mentioned above, that rules are followed and that the activities are removed from daily doings, it also adds other play-elements and – like in the case treated here – leaves room for a trickster or clown-like Marcolf whose obscene appearance and behaviour cause laughter and substitutes seriousness with fun.[2] I will only scratch the surface of the large and multifaceted areas of play studies and spatial studies and limit myself to showing that churches, as well as school environments associated with churches, are in fact spaces where the relationship between fun and seriousness is negotiated.

Over time the Marcolf-tradition has travelled between orality and literacy, between verbal and visual media, and between manuscript culture and print culture. The painting of the outspoken farmer, which is accompanied by a painting of his wife Politana, was made around 1480–1500 by Albertus Pictor, whose workshop stood behind the decoration of several churches in Mälardalen in Sweden (Ridder 2002; Melin 2006).[3] Besides these visual representations, numerous Latin and vernacular texts from across Europe and Scandinavia document the popularity of the tradition (Ziolkowski 2008; 2022a). The earliest Nordic textual evidence of the tradition is the Icelandic *Melkólfs saga ok Solomon konungs*, of which a short fragment from the first half of the fourteenth century survives. Later on (in the 19th century), the story of Solomon and Marcolf is attested in the Icelandic *rímur*-tradition.[4] The tradition of the rough farmer with the sharp tongue found its way into print culture at an early stage. A Latin version of the Marcolf story was printed in Schleswig in 1486. In Denmark the tradition is documented in chapbooks and several prints exist in Danish from the sixteenth century. The Danish chapbooks are closely related to (yet do not directly reproduce) German models. The written tradition about Marcolf also reached Sweden, where texts exist that are somewhat later than the visual representations in the Husby-Sjutolft church. Iris Ridder suggests that the textual tradition would enter Swedish court environments, where it took on a function similar to the *speculum*-genre, i.e., the so-called, mirror of kings (Ridder 2002, 215–24).

[2] For studies about the presence of rough, scatological, and satirical elements in sacred spaces, see the overview in Dahlerup 2010, 499–504 (on textual culture) and Lohfert Jørgensen 2004 (on visual culture). Rough elements, often associated with fecal and scatological features, has been seen as a language of the non-learned, who supposedly sings and speaks 'with the buttom', not the mouth, cp. Michael Camille (as quoted in Dahlerup 2010, 502–3).

[3] Albertus Pictor's style has been described as "innehållsrik och skiftande" ('content rich and changing') and it has been noted that he among Old and New testament motifs included paintings of "dagshistoriskt interesse" ('social-historical interest') (Cornell 1944, 144–45).

[4] On the Icelandic branch of the tradition, see Seelow 1989; Wolf 1993; Tucker 1996; Ziolkowski 2022b.

Marcolf has moved from one literary system to another, that is, from a Latin-based system for clerics, where the text originated, to a vernacular-based system for laypeople, where the popular genre of the chapbook became an important medium.[5] The time when Albertus Pictor and his workshop decorated the Husby-Sjutolft church may already have seen the embryonic beginnings of this transition of the clerical tradition into secular culture and popular culture, which also means that new audiences, or new admirers of Marcolf, could be the intended audience of the painting. That a Latin version was printed in 1486 in Schleswig nevertheless indicates that clerics were still among the recipients.

The painting of Marcolf is placed at a visible spot in the church. Marcolf is not accompanied by Solomon, for whom Marcolf's wife, Politana, has been substituted. The couple are placed opposite each other on the wall sections that form an arch that crosses the church nave, and everyone who moves through the church will pass by, or sit in-between, these two sturdy figures (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Interior of the Husby-Sjutolft church. Marcolf can be seen in the background on the lower part of the arch (to the right). His wife, Politana, can be glimpsed on the other side of the arch (to the left). Photo: Christer Malmberg.

They are certainly meant to be seen, a visibility that is underscored with banners painted on Marcolf's arms which says in Latin, "I am Marcolf," and which leaves no ambiguity as to who he is. Albertus Pictor depicts Marcolf as a broad, low, and hairy man with an upright feather in his hair and a phallic dagger between his legs, who is dressed in a

[5] On the prolonged life of the Marcolf-tradition as late as in the nineteenth century, see Glauser 1993.

two-coloured clown costume. It is not known which text was the background for the painting (Ridder 2002, 183), but Pictor's Marcolf has many resemblances with the description of the farmer in the Danish chapbook *En lystig samtale imellem Kong Solomon and Marcolfus*, which reads as follows:

> Marcolfus was short and fat, he had a big head and a broad forehead or face, filled with red wrinkles; his ears were hairy and hung down by his cheeks; he had large, broad eyes and they were very sly; under his lips was a sort of horse muzzle; he had hideous and smelly beard, like a billy goat; he had wide and chubby hands, stubby and plump fingers, pudgy and chubby feet, a long, pointed nose and crooked nose with a bump, and big, thick lips; he had a long face, like a donkey; his hair stood on head like a hedgehog brush, and was black, white, red and gray; he had sagging cheekbones and a big, forked chin; he was completely without a neck, and with a big hump on his back … he had … an ancient sword on his belt with a split scabbard …
> (Mitchell and Hermann 2022, 243)

Marcolf's wife Politana looks much the same, and husband and wife clearly are two of a kind. She is broad, low, and rough, too; she wears a low-cut dress, which shows the contours of her breasts (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3. The painting of Politana (1480–1500). Photo: Stephen Mitchell.

Also, in this case, the visual and the verbal representations go well together:

> His wife was very young, and had large breasts, each like a flask with four flagons of beer in it, and each nipple like a bucket; her hair was like a thorn bush, she had eyebrows like bristles on a hog back, and a beard like a billy goat's; her ears were long like donkey ears; she was also cross-eyed; her complexion was full of wrinkles; …she had nostrils the size of a big man's knotted fist and thick legs each like a beer firkin, and they were shaggy as a bear's paw, her clothes were quite ragged, so that they hung in tatters. (Mitchell and Hermann 2022, 243–44)

The descriptions of the couple focus on the rough dimensions of the human body and foreground, for instance, the phallus and the breast, which are bodily convexities that secure reproduction. In that sense, they have a focus on the earthly material, or the so-called 'low' side of human life, which stands in contrast with spiritual and intellectual dimensions. Moreover, both when it comes to social position and physical appearance, the couple is closer to nature than to culture. The peasants Marcolf and Politana are in fact so simple that they compare with animals (cp. the similarities with horses, hedgehogs, hogs, goats, donkeys, bears, and so on), which suggests that they transgress human/animal-boundaries.[6]

Marcolf and Politana neatly illustrate the Bakhtinian grotesque body, which, among other characteristics, has a preference for body-openings and exaggerates descriptions of orifices and convexities of the body (the mouth, the nostrils, the ears, the sexual organs) and for "the combination of animal traits" and human features (Bakhtin 1986, 316). It comes as no surprise that Mikhail Bakhtin found that the dialogue between Solomon and Marcolf was an excellent example to be used in his study of Rabelais, the carnivalesque, and laughter (see Bakhtin 1986).

The church paintings depict Marcolf and Politana standing with their hands on the knees and bowing forward and with one foot before the other. It thus looks as if they dance sort of a folk dance, which in fact implies that they are playing. That they dance is supported if the location of the paintings in the church space is taken into consideration; as already mentioned, the couple is placed opposite each other and facing each other. A look at the wider European Marcolf-tradition reveals that (later) visual sources depict Marcolf and Politana engaged in what looks like a form of uncontrolled dance (Meurer 2022, 21).[7] Play can be classified on a spectrum that goes from highly

[6] The description of the farmer and his wife must be seen in learned-theological context, where the intention is to establish a contrast between 'low' and 'high'. Thomas Aquinas explained that a nobility (like Solomon) is far removed from the category of the low, that is, an earthly materiality, as only in that case is it possible to have power over the physical world (Dahlerup 2010, 505). Marcolf, who is completely sunken down into the physical world has no power at all.

[7] Susanne Meurer has argued that woodcuts from the early part of the sixteenth-century display changing perceptions of the farmer Marcolf, who at that time was not anymore, as in the medieval tradition, "mere humourous literary or visual play" but a distinct social possibility. She argues that over time the grotesque peasant bodies of Marcolf and Politana, or Bolikana as the wife is called in the German tradition, had "turned from purveyors of carnivalesque delight to a potential source of anxiety." Maurer thus suggests that the Peasants' War, a popular uprising in Southern Germany in the

regulated (*ludus*) to non-rulebound (*paidia*) activities (Caillois 2001). It seems as if Marcolf and Politana's dance is connected to the latter type, which allows for rough forms of bodily expressions and which adds a layer of frivolity and gaiety to their grotesque bodies. Those present in the church sit in-between the two dancers, they are included in their dance-sphere, so to speak, and in that sense, they are part of the dance activity. The paintings of Marcolf and Politana therefore not only engage in a dialogue with a tradition consisting of verbal and visual media they also relate to the church-architecture, which acts as an additional medium.

Ludic behaviour allows for the combination of elements that are otherwise kept apart. Victor Turner saw play as a kind of threshold activity, or a liminal undertaking, characterised by antistructure. All aspects of culture are isolated yet they can be combined and recombined in different ways, and the activity of play will allow for new, even grotesque, combinations where things are brought together in possible rather than experienced ways (Turner 1974). The story of Marcolf, and the paintings that resonate with this story, illustrate such a playfulness, firstly, in as much as the meeting and the conversation between the farmer and the king bring together high and low culture; secondly, in as much as Marcolf's topsy-turvey comments, which bring Solomon's lofty words down to a coarse bodily level, connect world views that are otherwise kept apart; and, finally, in as much as Marcolf's physical appearance includes animal-features and therefore mixes different natures. The paintings of Marcolf and Politana indicate a playful attitude, which challenges and negotiates boundaries and because of the figures' coarse appearance may cause people to laugh. In other words, the idea of placing the rough couple in a visible place in the sacred space reveals a willingness to combine seriousness and fun, which adds to the idea that the church can be considered a playground.

However, that the figures bend their bodies forward does not only imply that they dance, it may also suggest that they carry something heavy on their shoulders and backs, and – given their location on the lower part of the wall sections that form the fundament of the arch – it looks as if they carry, or hold, this architectural structure. Nils Sundqvist has dealt with the motif of the *valvbärar* (arch-bearer) and identified ca. 20 examples in Uppland, Västmanland, Gästrik, and Dalarna where male figures appear on arches. One among these figures he identified as St Christopher, who – true to the legend – carries the child Jesus, but who at the same time is painted in a way that makes it look as if he holds the vault of the arch (Sundqvist 1950, 52–53). Sundqvist, who also mentions Marcolf in passing, is aware that church paintings cannot be expected to be decorative elements only, but are likely to carry a meaning within a comprehensive theological system. He compares the arches and the roof construction of the churches with the vault of heaven and places the arch-bearers as important foundational figures within such a cosmic system. The arch-bearers, according to him, are symbols of strength and power.

Terry Gunnell, who has dealt with pre-Christian spaces, has examined the multiple ways in which sacred spaces are imbued with symbolic meanings (e.g. 2001, 2006). He

middle of the 1520s threatened to permanently subvert social order and that the changing perceptions of Marcolf should be seen in that context (Maurer 2022, 21, 30).

argues that the interior of the pagan hall could represent whole cosmologies and that "people saw symbolic parallels between the roof and the hall … and the sky and the heavens" (Gunnell 2001, 21). Moreover, Norse texts from the early Christian period, such as the Old Norwegian and Old Icelandic stave church homilies, are quite explicit about the symbolic or allegorical meaning of church architecture (Indrebø 1931; de Leeuw van Weenen 1993).

Thinking along these lines, it is likely that Marcolf and Politana, due to their location within the church building, might not only be carriers of the arch in a literal sense, but rather powerful carriers of the vault of heaven. In this case, the image of the couple expands beyond what can be read and seen in the verbal and visual sources, and the interplay between painting and materiality, i.e. the church's architecture, brings new meanings to the figures.[8]

When Marcolf and Politana are installed as somebody who carries the architectural structure above them these extremely earthly figures, who are submerged in a life in physical materiality, become foundations of a material construction, which is literally made of earthly matter. As they are transformed and become building bricks, it nearly seems as if they become swallowed by the material world that they are part of. Equally interesting, of course, is the fact that a couple, which so clearly has been formed from the category of the low (socially, bodily, and regarding their nature) are placed so centrally in a symbolic cosmology. It indicates that high and low, as well as seriousness and laughter, could be combined in unexpected ways.[9]

Various explanations have been given as to why the story of Marcolf played a role in clerical culture. It has been suggested that Marcolf's responses to Solomon's words were formulated by, and read by, self-ironic clerics who made fun of their own learning, or the text has been seen as a parody of biblical learning, which reveals how inclusive clerical culture actually was (Lehmann 1963; Curschmann 1993). Iris Ridder has mentioned the possibility that the Marcolf-story is a handbook in rhetoric (Ridder 2002). It makes very good sense to understand the paintings of Marcolf and Politana in a context of learning. Both the early part of the textual Marcolf-tradition and the paintings treated here connect well with biblical knowledge and rhetorical learning, two elements that went hand in hand in clerical environments. The *Bible*, after all, offers the intertext of the Marcolf-story, and Solomon's words – which give the structure of the conversation between the king and the farmer – quote both the Old and the New Testaments, for example, The Book of Proverbs, the Book of the Sermons, The Book of Job, the Gospels, and Pauline letters (Dahlerup 2010, 501). When measured against the

[8] The paintings can be seen as sign of the popularity of the Marcolf-tradition soon before the transitional period between the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. It is likely that the first embryonic changes with regard to reception and audience had begun, and Ridder suggests that Albertus Pictor's painting of Marcolf should be connected to historical developments in Sweden. The circumstance that he, a farmer, is placed in such a prominent position in the church may, according to her, indicate his function as an identification figure for free peasants (see Ridder 2002, 186–87).

[9] Marcolf, now inserted in an architectural context, differs from deformed characters drawn in manuscripts, which often belong to the marginalia. Albertus Pictor's painting places Marcolf, not in the margin, but very central in the architecture of the church.

biblical passages, the subversion of Solomon's words can be seen as mnemonic pegs, which remind well-informed clerics of a whole catalogue of biblical text passages and biblical motifs. The rhetorical area *memoria* teaches that the ability to remember is particularly well helped by striking images and strong expressions, and Marcolf's colourful words and references to concrete earthly phenomena definitely conjure up images in the front of the mind's eyes. As such the paintings can be seen as helpful triggers of memory.

While the relevance of the rhetorical concept of *memoria* should not be overlooked, another rhetorical concept seems even more relevant, namely the style-orientated concept *decorum*, which teaches how each topic requires certain modes of expression, for instance, how a low topic (like a farmer) is described in a low style and with a plain or vulgar language, while a high topic (like a noble king) is described with other styles and vocabularies. Put simply, the rhetorical principle behind the description of Marcolf is that the lower down the farmer is, the higher up Solomon is.

The painting of Marcolf may serve to demonstrate rhetorical principles. The strong contrasts, the parallelisms, the grouping of themes, and so on, which the dialogue between the king and the peasant is structured around, can be explained by the circumstance that the text was a form of rhetorical treatise.[10] As an educational book, the main thing would be to train clerics, an effort that was particularly well helped by illustrative examples. It seems as if learned clerics trusted that the principle of exaggeration could help students to understand – this to an extent where Marcolf, essentially a rhetorical construct, became so conspicuous that it could take on multiple other functions as time passed.[11] All this learning might have connected itself to Albertus Pictor's paintings, too.

Two things should be noted here of relevance to the theme of play. Firstly, it is hard not to believe that the exaggerations and strong contrasts that Marcolf represents would have resulted in fun and giggling for someone who knew the tradition, and the paintings would not only have triggered memories of biblical texts and rhetorical principles but also laughter. The attraction of the Marcolf-story may very well be the playful attitude that it displays. This takes me to the second point, namely that such levity may have been to the benefit of learning, perhaps even an intentional tool for learning. Modern studies of education have shown that learning and play go hand in hand, and that play can support learning activities and education (Mardell 2023). This argument was not theorised in a systematic way in the late Middle Ages, but it may lie implicitly in the Marcolf-material that someone who has fun will be inclined to learn – and to remember – better.

Places do something to people, and as I have suggested, elements may be installed in the sacred space of the church which will allow someone to laugh. In an introduction

[10] On the interest in play modes like parody and satire in medieval school environments, see Lehmann 1963.

[11] Iris Ridder (2014) points out that the text has a misogynic view and represent a world of male scholars. While this is true, I do believe that learning through illustrative examples was the main purpose of the text rather than to bring on any particular message about gender roles or social estates as such.

to the transmission of the Marcolf-tradition Jan Ziolkowski writes that "It turns out that nowhere is truly foolproof" (Ziolkowski 2022a, xvi), a statement that goes well with the idea that even sacred spaces may at times turn into playgrounds.

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# WHO WAS LUCIA?
# THE LUCIA FIGURE IN SWEDISH FOLKLORE

Tommy Kuusela*

Once a year, Swedish media writes about the Lucia celebrations in Sweden on December 13 and internet forums are full of sentiments about how it should be. A common opinion is that the person who dresses up as Lucia should be a young woman, preferably a blonde, dressed in a white nightshirt with a wreath of lights in her hair, accompanied by an entourage of singing star boys, maids and perhaps gingerbread men or *tomtar*, all of whom are spreading light in the darkness. This is something that many Swedes have a strong opinion about. Usually, angry comments protest against changes. When something is altered, it is seen as a deviation from a traditional Swedish Lucia celebration. All kinds of voices complain: "Wrong ethnicity!", "A boy can't dress up as Lucia!", "Lucia is changed because of political correctness!", and so on. A blonde girl with candles in her hair, singing a specific set of songs together with a group of star singers, is what many believe to be the correct way of celebrating Lucia. But if you ask a Swede about the origins of Lucia celebrations or what older traditions actually looked like, few have an answer besides what they have experienced themselves or heard from their parents. But as any folklorist knows, traditions have always changed. There is no such thing as a fixed or unchanging tradition. This is true of Lucia as well. In fact, the Swedish Lucia tradition is not old at all. If we try to pierce through the fog of time, we will get a glimpse of something that only roughly reminds us of the scene of our time. Among the peasantry, Lucia rarely had anything to do with the saint at all, she was sometimes interpreted as a good figure, at other times as a wicked or dangerous figure.

The folklore archives of the Institute for Language and Folklore contain several thousand records of Lucia and the Lucia celebrations. The collecting of folklore for the archives began in the second half of the nineteenth century. Because of the extensive collections, my focus will be on how Lucia was imagined in older times, in rural areas. A short article has its limitations. There is not enough space to explore all the customs

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and traditions associated with the Lucia celebration or to describe its development through time. I will argue that very few had any idea of who Lucia was and that the different notions were contradictory. Some perceived her as a good and helpful person, whose greatest pleasure was to help those who were in difficulty. Others, however, had a more negative attitude, which may possibly be explained by the similarity of names between Lucifer and Lucia. It is important to emphasise that Lucia is a multifaceted tradition. It would be impossible to try to find *one* original folk tradition or one notion about who Lucia was supposed to be. Instead, we should expect several different ideas and explanations.

**Lucia in Sweden**

The Swedish celebration of Lucia has recently been described as "the most Swedish of all traditions" (Strömberg 2017). In an overview of Swedish mumming traditions, Eva Knuts says that Lucia is "one of Lutheran Sweden's leading symbols" (Knuts 2007, 122). This is of course noteworthy as Lucia is a Catholic saint and Sweden has been a Protestant country since the 1500s. The Reformation took place through two decisions by the Riksdag (the supreme decision-making body of the Kingdom of Sweden) in 1527 and 1544. With the reformation, older beliefs, including the worship of saints, were eradicated. Until 1858, people who converted to Catholicism could be punished by exile. In this light, it appears strange that the Lucia celebration is often perceived as an ancient Swedish tradition. However, this has happened at a time when a large part of the population was secularised. The historian of religion David Thurfjell, argues that religious ways of thinking in Sweden have been transformed rather than disappeared. A large percentage of Swedes today are living in a post-Christian society (Thurfjell 2015). This is also true of Sweden's relationship with Lucia. Lucia celebrations in Sweden have very little to do with the Catholic martyr St Lucia, besides her name.

Let us move on to one of the first questions that a reader might ask. Why is Lucia a thing in Sweden? In fact, a cult of the saint Lucia has never been of importance. The reason her name has survived has to do with the Calendar of saints where it appears in the almanac on December 13. There are old descriptions of customs associated with the day. One record from 1666 says that people used to prepare big pots of meat and eat from them early in the morning on the night of Lucia, but does not mention any masks or mumming traditions (ULMA 8561, transcription).

Since the fourteenth century, December 13 has been the shortest day of the year and the longest night of the year, due to the imprecision of the calendar in the Nordic countries. In Catholic times, the Christmas fast began on this day. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to eat breakfast several times over; a tradition that would remain in later times (Knuts 2007, 122). The night of Lucia used to coincide with the winter solstice, until the calendar reform in 1753. Young people dressed up in different costumes, walked together around the cottages and sang and begged for food and drink. With the calendar reform, the winter solstice – the longest night of the year – was moved to the day of St Thomas on December 21 (Malmstedt 1994).

Even if the official date of the winter solstice was moved, the understanding of the night of St Lucia as the longest night of the year persisted in the imagination of the peasantry. The common folk then had two calendars to take note of, one initiated by the government and the other from oral folk tradition. Older beliefs persisted and the night of the thirteenth was associated with darkness and all kinds of dangers; supernatural beings were believed to be particularly active, dark and evil forces were on the move, and so on. At the same time, the night was considered to be a good time for omens and divination. There are cautions against working or doing anything on that night. Many of the instructions for the night continued to be protection against different kinds of threats, even after the Winter solstice was moved to a later date.

There are many folklore records describing how one would participate in the mumming tradition of Lucia; it was called to *lussa* or *gå lussä*. In some cases, girls would dress up as boys and boys would dress up as girls. These were typical mask and mumming traditions where some dressed up beyond recognition as various craftsmen such as blacksmiths, coppersmiths, rope makers, chimney sweeps, and so on. Sometimes young people dressed up as scary characters such as devils, *Lusseper* ('the *Lusse* Per') and *Lussekäringen* ('the *Lusse* Crone'). It was also common to cover the face with soot, chalk, or a mask, and to dress in furs or straw. Usually, the purpose was to roam the village and offer services in exchange for a bit of pork, alcohol and coins. It was a form of begging, with the young people entertaining with songs. The songs could be humorous or crude in nature. The fact that there was mischief in connection with this custom makes it partly reminiscent of modern-day Halloween celebrations, but also of other, older mumming traditions in Europe and beyond (cf. Gunnell 2007). All kinds of figures could appear together with Lucia. Some examples: Lucia was accompanied by a courtier and a seeress (VFF 330), she was attended by members of the Roma people (IFGH 3331), by boys dressed as pregnant women (IFGH 4395), by the Yule goat (IFGH 1920), by Judas with the purse (IFGH 4076), or by a fiddler (IFGH 2059).

The Lucia celebration as we know it today was first fashioned by Artur Hazelius and his colleagues in 1893 for the open-air museum Skansen in Stockholm. During the first half of the twentieth century, it got a stricter composition and structure when the procession was combined with a beauty contest and the performance began looking more identical in different parts of the country. It was during this period that what we now refer to as the Swedish Lucia celebration was born. The oldest known example of an actual Lucia celebration is from a manor house as early as 1764. It mentions a travelling priest who decided to stay the night in the village of Horn close to Skövde. In the morning he is woken by two women dressed in white, one with angel wings and a candle in her hand, the other with a tray filled with edibles. Similar descriptions of breakfast in bed on Lucia by a young woman, an older woman or even a stable hand, are mentioned in different descriptions from the late 1700s and 1800s. They all seem to point to a German origin, reminiscent of the Kinken Jes tradition associated with Christmas on the continent (Swahn 2016, 54). Lucia was celebrated among students in university towns, among sailors and other work groups and then spread to the general public (schools, workplaces, television, and so on).

The idea of Lucia as a white-clad young woman is the result of several factors. One important influence, besides the celebration at Skansen, is the newspaper *Stockholms Dagblad* which organised a public Lucia procession through Stockholm in 1927. The year after, the same newspaper arranged a beauty contest where a Lucia was crowned. Hundreds of photographs were sent in by young women and a winner was handpicked by a male jury. At the same time, Lucia celebrations spread from manor houses in Western Sweden throughout the country to schools, offices, public institutions, business companies, churches and so on. Another important factor was the students. Some brought Lucia celebrations with them to university towns and others brought it back to their hometowns and into rural areas. It would take some time before Lucia became well-known among the general public throughout the country. In many of the records made by the archive, it is clear that most people did not celebrate Lucia before the twentieth century. When the archives collected stories about Lucia in questionnaires and through interviews from the 1930s onwards, it is actually remarkable how many people say that Lucia was unknown in their childhood (ULMA M115; M152; K 14; S 42). Even negative data is worth bearing in mind.

**Who was Lucia According to the Peasantry?**

The folklore archives contain a wealth of information about Lucia, including who the common folk thought she was. There are different ways of interpreting the name Lucia from the folklore records. One is that it comes from the Latin word for light, *Lux*, but also that it has something to do with Lucifer. Another idea was that the name some gave the day, *Lusse*, was tied up with another figure, *Lusseguben* ('The *Lusse* man') who was nasty and dangerous. Another folk interpretation is that the name Lucia had something to do with lice, the Swedish word for a louse is *lus*. For some, Lucia was thought of as Adam's first wife (Knuts 2007, 123–24).

The great variation shows that there was hardly any uniform tradition, with a widespread and fixed explanation of the Lucia figure. In other words, it is not possible to determine what the 'original' perception of who Lucia was considered to be among the common people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is also typical of popular conceptions that there are contradictions and great variation. Sometimes Lucia is described as a bad person or a pagan and ungodly woman. One example from the district of Bohuslän says that a Lucia was someone who had committed adultery and gave birth to a child. She wore a crown made of pig bristles and her entourage spread ashes after her for protection against getting illegitimate children themselves (VFF 676). One record says that she was an evil spirit and that the best way to protect oneself from her was to scare her away with the smoke from burning fat (IFGH 3225). One informant from Västergötland thinks that she is a sinful woman who disguised herself as an angel of light (IFGH 3535). Others think of her as something pagan, which might be correct from a Lutheran perspective, even if they had no idea who she was (IFGH 3226). One person even says that Lucia was Satan in disguise (IFGH 3706).

In some contexts, she is associated with supernatural beings and in such a context it is sometimes said that she is the mother of *vittra*. In a record from Härjedalen in 1941, an 82-year-old woman tells how Lucia hides all her children in the cellar when Jesus visits her, making them invisible. The people are then called *luciabergsfolk* or *alenajit* (ULMA 20227; a version of the folktale ATU 758). In a record from Värmland, it is said that Lucia once was a pagan queen (IFGH 885). In a 1951 record, an older man from Värmland describes Lucia as a "naughty woman and a drunkard" (IFGH 5623). Another record from Värmland says that *lussebrud* ('*Lusse* bride') is a term used for someone who is a harlot (ULMA 6323). A few records say that Lucia was a ghostly pig (a sow) that appeared in a mill during the longest night of the year (i.e. IFGH 6128). In a record from Ångermanland from 1933, she is described as a witch (ULMA 8525). In other variants, she is a fortune teller. An elderly woman from Västergötland describes, in a record from 1931, that Lucia was a widow who had sold her soul to Satan (IFGH 4572). Another person, this time from Ångermanland, thinks that Lucia was a witch (*trollkäring*) who somehow was banished from Sweden (ULMA 8525). In one record, the informant thinks that Lucia was a murderer (IFGH 3406). More examples from different regions around the country – predominately in Norrland – seem to confirm that Lucia was perceived as an 'evil spirit' or something else that was negative.

The problem with these perceptions of Lucia is that they coexisted with other, completely contradictory ideas. In other words, we cannot assume that Lucia was originally seen as a negative figure. One informant from Västergötland is uncertain and says that Lucia was a charitable woman, but says that it could possibly be the other way around. Maybe she taught humans agriculture, but it was not right to celebrate her because she is none other than Lucifer (ULMA 2566:7). A similar record from Dalarna says that Lucifer is out and about on the night of Lucia (ULMA 10002). Several records describe Lucia as a beautiful goddess (IFGH 1360), a saint who offered a drink that gave the people the will to live (IFGH 3534), a charitable woman, a saint and a kind person (ULMA 4777), a saint that was stoned to death (IFGH 3035), a nun (IFGH 4515), a virtuous queen who embraced the Christian faith (IFGH 1154), a seeress (IFGH 3344), a beautiful virgin (IFGH 3534), and so on. Various records state that she came from the West and distributed gifts, sometimes specifically addressed to children when there was war in the country. A 40-year-old man from Värmland says in a record from 1933 that Lucia was murdered because she wanted to follow the Lutheran doctrine (IFGH 3136; 3137). One informant from Värmland states that Lucia was a queen who was boiled in a cauldron made of copper; another record from the same landscape says that Lucia once was a wicked woman (IFGH 1291). A man from Västergötland tells the archive in a record from 1934 that Lucia was a Christian maiden whom the Roman Emperor Nero wanted to marry, but that she refused and was given a *lussebulle* ('*Lusse* bum') before being executed (IFGH 3279). In a collection of stories from Östergötland, collected in 1928, Lucia is explained to be derived from the evangelist Luke (ULMA 1756:1). There are also variants of the name in the archives that point to a male being. In one record from Ångermanland a man says that *Lusse* rode a black sow with vipers as reins. He also says that *Lusse* is bound in chains and that he wriggles and shakes the ground to get free

(ULMA 30706; 23795); this is of course a variant of the mythical motif of the fettered or bound giant or monster that causes earthquakes (Olrik 1914). Another person says that *Lusse* was a man dressed in dog skin fur (ULMA 6828). In a legend known from both Västergötland and Värmland, Lucia appeared after a period of famine. The people who prayed for her saw her standing at the bow of a ship with light around her head. On her ship, there was food that saved the people from starvation (IFGH 1606; B51 in Klintberg 2010, 41).

A record from Dalsland in 1916 tells us that *Loppepär* ('Lice-Per') drove around every day with a load of lice, and that it was dangerous because he could throw his burden at someone. There are sayings and beliefs that link the name *Lusse* with Lucifer. According to this, demonic figures associated with Lice are out and about during the *Lusse* night. Millers were warned that the mill had to stand still, otherwise *Lussemannen* ('The louse man') would destroy it (ULMA 2219:3). One person from Dalarna speaks of a group of supernatural beings, collectively known as Lucia, who danced in the forest during summer and left ring formed markings in the grass (ULMA 1992). This is a motif otherwise associated with *älvor* and is known throughout Western Europe as fairy rings or fairy circles. In some places, there is talk of the *Lussefarden*, a terrifying procession of supernatural beings that travelled through the air during the *Lusse* night led by Lucia herself (ULMA 5042). This is a variant of the legend type The Wild Hunt, which in other contexts could be led by the Devil, Odin, Thor, a king, a hunter, or the like (Nyman 1976). Many of these notions of Lucia/*Lusse* could be in circulation at the same time across the country, even in the same area.

**Who was Lucia? Some Theories**

Lucia was added to the calendar of saints on December 13 in the Middle Ages. As a result, her name became associated with folklore that lingered long after the conversion. We can roughly identify two folk versions of Lucia in folklore: a Lucia of light and a Lucia of darkness. Various scholarly theories have been put forward to explain Lucia's background and origin.

One theory is that the origin of Lucia can be traced back to St Nicholas, the patron saint of children. His feast day is December 6 and the same day was a school graduation day in ancient times. Diligent children were given presents and sweets by a person dressed as the bishop. The bishop's entourage included a devil figure who threatened to take lazy and rowdy children to hell. The Protestant churches wanted to get rid of Catholic practices. In Germany, St Nicholas was replaced by another gift-giver, the Christ Child (Christkindlein, Kindchen Jesus, Kinken Jes), and the practice of gift-giving was moved to Christmas. Ideally, it was a cute little girl who would play the role of the Christ Child. She wore a white robe with a wreath of candles on her head. In the eighteenth century, this custom came to Sweden from Germany, but was considered inappropriate in the festive Christmas celebrations and transferred to Lucia. The Christ Child was renamed Lucia in the manor houses of Västergötland. From the same period, there are records of Lucia being celebrated in a manor house setting in other parts of

western Sweden. There is a lot to be said for the theory, at least when it comes to explaining the origin of the white-clad Lucia. But it does not explain other aspects of who Lucia was imagined to be in older times (Swahn 2007, 71–73).

An older theory is that the figure of Lucia can be traced back to pre-Christian times. Comparisons have been drawn to the Norse goddess Freya or to other goddesses from the Near East such as Inanna, Ishtar or Lilith/Lilitu (for Lucia as a remnant of a pagan goddess, see Johansson 1906). In this context, fertility and vegetation cults are at the centre of the arguments. It is said that girls used to dress wholly or partly in straw during the *Lusse* celebration. The notion of the '*Lusse* bride' is in this light a relic from an ancient harvest rite associated with the end of the agrarian year and the threshing season. What has been overlooked in such a context is that young men could also be dressed in straw and were called straw men (as opposed to straw women). Another flaw with this theory is that straw figures and people wearing straw were not limited to Lucia celebrations.

Some theories are favoured and justified by drawing parallels between pre-Christian times and later customs and practices. Continuity is a possibility, of course, but can be hard to confirm, especially when it covers a length of almost one thousand years. For this to make sense, a researcher needs to explain changes in society and beliefs during this time. The potential of one or even two stories sharing some minor similarities is not enough. In a way, this way of constructing the past means that material that does not fit is sorted out and the reader is not told whether the examples selected are common in folk tradition or isolated cases, nor if there are contradictions in the source material (for this approach, see Egardt 2015). In addition, there may be differences from different parts of the country. Generalisations about the past and the diverseness of folklore can be a slippery road. Many of the theories circulating about Lucia's origins are theories that are difficult to verify. It can be compared to a jigsaw puzzle where pieces that do not fit are ignored. As for the Old Norse roots, we hardly know what a cult to Freyja looked like in pre-Christian times, which makes it difficult to assess such comparisons. The information found in medieval sources are primarily from Iceland and Norway (Näsström 1995). In addition, there is a gap of just over a thousand years between the time before Christianity took hold in Scandinavia and the descriptions of Lucia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (in addition, a transition from Catholicism to Protestantism and, over time, various churches such as Baptists, Methodists, Reformed, Pentecostal etc.).

Another theory is that there is a link between Lucia and Lilith. I only know of two records from the folklore archives with this information. One is a 1908 letter from the collector, Levi Johansson, to Edvard Hammarstedt, intendant at the Nordic Museum. Johansson had spoken to an informant in Jämtland who said that Lucia was called Lilith. She was described as a nasty woman with red hair and brown eyes. He said that all red-haired and brown-eyed women descended from her (quoted in Ek-Nilsson 2010, 21; a similar record exists from Västergötland where Lucia's wicked daughters have freckles and red hair, IFGH 3698). Johansson had earlier written about a connection between Lucia and pagan goddesses and speculated that there might be a link with the rabbinic Lilith, which might explain his enthusiasm (Johansson 1906). Another folklore collector

who gives a similar note is Erik Jonas Lindberg, also from Jämtland. In the record (ULMA 29950), which is a third addition made in 1979 to a previous account about Lucia, Lindberg mentions that Lucia is the same as Lilith and that she was Adam's first wife. In a record from 1969, he calls Adam's first wife Lucia/Lössö (ULMA 26900). Erik Jonas Lindberg is infamous for inventing material for the archive (Wall 2007). The name Lilith is otherwise unheard of in Swedish folklore. The motif of Lilith being the first wife of Adam exists in Judaic traditions but is not mentioned in the Bible. No one has tried to explain how a motif from rabbinic traditions would have been part of folk tradition. Both folklore collectors who claimed that this was true were in fact learned men. In rabbinic literature, Lilith is variously depicted as the mother of Adam's demonic offspring after his separation from Eve, or as his first wife. In Jewish folklore, Lilith is the 'night monster,' an evil demonic being who threatens children and women in childbirth. The only part linking Lucia with Lilith that fits is the idea of one of them being Adam's first wife. The Swedish folk legend type "K181: How the fairies became invisible" (Folktale: ATU 758) is sometimes associated with Lucia. One informant says that Lucia's offspring became ungodly and that they are the giants and trolls of the world (IFGH 1402), and another says that she was often pregnant and gave birth to six or twelve children at a time and that they became the trolls and the farmstead spirits of the world (IFGH 3516; K181 in Klintberg 2010, 199).

It is unlikely that the remains of a cult of a pre-Christian goddess would have survived without the Church reacting and acting fiercely against it. Had this been the case, we would have expected written records of this. Even when Freyja or other Old Norse figures are mentioned in the folklore material, we should expect that the names may have entered the popular imagination as a result of the waves of national romanticism during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapbooks, folk books, novels, local history studies, poems, songs, newspaper articles and the like all touched on the world of Norse gods and heroes and thus spread stories about them to the folk.

**Not a Uniform Image**

We can perhaps speak of two Lucia traditions among the peasantry. The first, and oldest, was a rural mask and mumming tradition, similar to other traditions during the winter months. The second was the celebration of Lucia with a procession starting in urban areas, with the help of newspapers and institutions. In addition to this, there are different notions of who Lucia was. In many parts, predominantly in Northern Sweden, a more negative image of Lucia associating her with darkness and evil forces. In Götaland, this negative notion seems to be mixed up with Lucia as a saviour and a light in the darkness. Finally, an idea about Lucia that derives from the saint, but not from Christian legends about her, rather from folk legends and beliefs based on her name and associations with it.

The official Catholic legend of St Lucia has been spread by school people and priests and later adapted and reshaped by a scholarly, literary, bourgeois tradition. This is probably the bit that feels familiar today. But alongside these (predominantly) urban

traditions there have been a number of different (rural) interpretations of Lucia among the common people, who have interpreted and adapted the saint's name to different popular beliefs and explanatory models. What becomes clear is that there never was a uniform picture of who Lucia was. Stories about her and stories that have risen from interpretations of her name have been recast and adapted according to time, place and storytellers.

The folk hardly had an unbroken nor precise understanding of Lucia. For them, it was not even certain that Lucia had anything to do with the Catholic saint at all, let alone what she looked like. There was no standardisation of the Lucia figure in the rural society. The latter is, as we have seen, a relatively new phenomenon, dating back to the first half of the 1900s. The extensive folklore material is so massive and varied that one can try to 'prove' almost anything if one focuses on one or a few records from the collections. Combining this with speculation and comparisons in time and space can lead to diverse results and conclusions. Anyone who wants to describe Lucia in ancient times, or who has ideas about how the folk understood her, would gain a lot by visiting folklore archives and investigating the thousands upon thousands of stories collected there. Only then would it be possible to gain a glimpse of how Lucia was understood and celebrated among the folk.

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# ASPECTS OF IRISH AND SCANDINAVIAN HEARTH PROTOCOLS AND ASSOCIATED INVOCATIONS

Séamas Ó Catháin*

Seán Ó Súilleabháin's masterly 699-page adaptation of Sweden's *Landsmålsarkiv* index – *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* (Ó Súilleabháin 1942) – paralleled the Uppsala system, tweaking and expanding it to accommodate the substantial body of Irish material that had been amassed following the establishment of the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935. That recalibration of the Swedish system to suit Irish conditions is nowhere more evident than in the domain of religious tradition. In this case, such was the extent of the Irish archive's resources (even in those early days) that part of one of the *Handbook*'s fourteen chapters (13) and another (12) was given over in its entirety to this theme. The array of topics listed there and consequently figuring abundantly in the National Folklore Collection of Ireland includes numerous examples of occasional formulae. These are applicable in a wide variety of circumstances.that predominantly reflect – as Bengt af Klintberg observed of Sweden's *trollformler* ('magic formulae') – a 'Christian worldview' (af Klintberg 2012, 67 ["speglade en kristen föreställnings värld"]). One of the most popular and widespread invocations was that enunciated while 'raking the fire' (smooring or banking the fire) at bedtime. This was a process designed to keep the fire alive overnight while simultaneously providing protection for the home against accidental conflagration. Generally, this exercise was performed by the last member of the household to retire for the night, in most cases this being the *bean an tí* or 'woman of the house.'

Abundant examples of the Irish *Paidir Choigilt na Tine* [The Prayer for Saving the Fire] have facilitated the identification of regional variants (Ó Catháin 1999a), the following being one of the commonest types:

> *Coiglim an tine seo mar a choiglíonn cách / Bríd ina bun agus Muire ina barr / Dhá aingle déag d'aingle na ngrást / Ag clúdach an tí seo go lá.*
> (Ó Catháin 1999a, 91)

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I save this fire just like everyone else / Brigit beneath it and Mary above /The twelve angles of the graces / Protecting this house till day.

A striking feature of this prayer is the image of the encompassment and containment of fire by two eminent female figures – the Virgin Mary and *Bríd* (Brigit), the latter being one of Ireland's top-ranking saints (modelled on an earlier Celtic goddess-figure) dating from the fifth century and the beginning of the Christian period. *Bríd* is often presented in Irish (and Scottish) Gaelic folk tradition as having been a companion or midwife to Christ's mother and remembered in folklore as Mary's equal and coeval.

The synchrony of the arrangement in its bed of ashes of the last fire of the evening in tandem with the plea for the intercession of such named eminences in order to accomplish the perfect encirclement of its glowing coals – Brigit beneath and Mary above – is noteworthy. No less intriguing is the delegation of the task of 'protecting [lit. 'covering'] the house [from fire]' till morning to a 'dozen angels of the graces,' bearing in mind that the word *aingeal* 'angel' also means 'fire' (Ó Catháin 2023, 127).

Open-hearth kitchen fires (and their attendant gallimaufry of soot-covered fixtures and utensils) are a rare sight in Ireland nowadays and the once commonplace daily morning round of uncovering live embers from the ashes in which they lay overnight has all but ceased. As late as the 1980s, however, it was still possible to observe this ritual and also, in certain places, hear recited the above-mentioned prayer or, alternatively, the wording of this prayer repeated in isolation from any hearth-side setting.

The sample Irish prayer to which af Klintberg (2012, 71) has called attention was collected by me in an Irish-speaking community in north-west County Mayo – an isolated nook not unknown to the esteemed recipient of this volume – where the practice of raking the fire is now more or less defunct. The words of the prayer survive in popular tradition there, however, divested of their everyday practical application and relevance. Elsewhere, the fading fortunes of the language in which this prayer is couched served to undermine its viability in the new language dispensation. Where Irish was no longer spoken, peat fires continued to be 'saved' night after night but, as far as I know, an English-language counterpart prayer never seems to have evolved.

My maternal great-grandmother, Anne McGirr (1857–1942), was born at a time when Irish was still vibrant in many parts of Ireland, including her native parish (and, indeed, mine too) in County Tyrone. The cataclysmic language shift towards English was already underway in such places, however, and while Anne probably had a knowledge of Irish, she only spoke it when saying her prayers, as her granddaughter (whom she raised) informed me. As 'the woman of the house,' the nightly duty of raking the fire would have fallen to her and *Paidir Choigilt na Tine* would surely have been among her Irish prayers. In the next generation of that family, the fire would continue to be raked in traditional fashion, but aphonically; in following generations, the open-hearth itself gradually disappeared and, eventually, the custom of raking the fire was swept to oblivion along with the special prayer once associated with it.

To sum up the Irish situation: until relatively recently where Irish was spoken and where open-hearth fires were to be found, the nightly recitation of *Paidir Choigilt na Tine* was a routine part of everyday life. Open-hearth fires continued to be raked following

the language shift but with the omission – *force majeure* – of the accompanying Irish-language prayer. Subsequently, the replacement of open-hearth fires and their appurtenances by enclosed cooking appliances with hot plates and integrated boilers rendered impossible the banking of the fire by covering it with ashes in the time-honoured fashion. In such wise was sounded the death knell of an age-old custom.

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Some decades before my great-grandmother learned her prayers at her mother's knee, in similar wise, a Danish girl called Maren Per Johans – as this account drawn from the holdings of the Danish Folklore Collection illustrates – was also becoming versed in hers. This item was taken down from Laur. Nielsen, a native of Højby on the island of Zealand in the early years of the twentieth century. Nielsen said that he had heard it from his fellow parishioner Maren Per Johans who died aged 81 in 1880. The Danish scholar Ferdinand Ohrt was greatly taken by this anecdote as his comments in the introduction to his now almost century-old analysis of Danish folk prayers reveal. His remarks may be paraphrased as follows.

During Sunday School in a country church in the parish of Højby, probably sometime in the 1840s, the minister called upon one of the girls there present to recite her favourite verse. To the minister's consternation, this individual proffered a form of evening devotion – an old Catholic folk prayer – alive and well in popular tradition, three hundred years after the Reformation.[1]

That prayer, remembered (and presumably recited all her life) by Maren Per Johans, goes as follows:

> Jomfru Maria, milde Mø, – kom til mig, naar jeg skal dø – luk mine Øjne, taet min Mund, – vogt min Sjæl for Helvedes Grund!
> (Ohrt 1928, 3)
>
> O Virgin Mary, gentle maid, come to me at the hour of my death – shut my eyes, close my mouth, – save my soul from the depths of hell!

In light of the widespread occurrence in Scandinavia of other popular invocations involving the Virgin Mary – including the prayer for saving the fire – it is tempting to suppose that Maren Per Johans life-long attachment to the above bed-time prayer may point towards the possibility of her also having been acquainted with some version or

[1] "En Søndag, formentlig i 1840erne, var der Overhøring i en sjællandsk Landsbykirke, og Præsten opfordrede een af Pigerne paa Kirgegulvet at sige et Vers, hvilket hun nu selv holdt mest af. Saa fremsagde hun, sikkert til Præstens Bestyrtelse, omtrent følgende: 'Jomfruu Maria, milde Mø, – kom til mig, naar jeg skal dø – luk mine Øjne, tæt min Mund, – vogt min Sjæl for helvedes Grund!' Et katolsk Vers i Folkemunde tre Hundred Aar efter Kirke forbedringen – i et Glimt røbedes her, at Folksjælen stadigt hægede om Minder fra Romerkirkens Tider, Minder som fredeligt trivedes sammen med senere tilkomne Lag." Ohrt's tentative advertence to the 1840s probably refers to the occasion when Laur. Nielsen heard Maren Per Johans (who would have then been in middle life) relate this anecdote rather than when she first heard it.

other of the Scandinavian prayer for saving the fire, something along the lines of the following Swedish example:

> Jag fäster denna ild i glö, såvist som Jungfru Maria var mö.
> (Feilberg 1899, 70)
>
> I save this fire aglow, as sure as the Virgin Mary was a maid.

It is immediately obvious that this formulation is both briefer and simpler than its Gaelic cousin. Its focus is entirely on the business of *preserving* the fire and the issue of protecting house and household gains no mention. The Virgin Mary is accorded the status of sole guarantor in this matter, but there is no plea for her (or any other saintly individual's) intercession against the threat of conflagration. Consequently, the bipartisan and bipartite nature of the Irish prayer does not find an exact match in its Scandinavian equivalent.

This Scandinavian hearth prayer would have been used every night of the year possibly bar one, namely, a premier folk-calendar festival dedicated to St Knut variously associated with the Epiphany (6 January) and the twentieth day of Christmas (13 January). In some locations, however, hearth protocols on the eve of St Knut's feast day deviated from the usual format in featuring *inter alia* the introduction of a prayer the wording of which seems to have been adapted from the usual type of Scandinavian hearth prayer. Here, St Knut supplants the Virgin Mary and his name is conjoined in the process with Almighty God. Thus, a bipartisan format akin to that of the Irish prayer is manifested.

> Ikvæld vil e Elden raka/imorgo vil e hon levande taka/hjælpe me Gu aa Santa-Knut/at alder min Verma slokna ut.
> (Wikman 1929, 200)
>
> Tonight I shall rake this fire/Tomorrow I will receive it alive/Help me God and St Knut/(So) that my fire never dies out.

This form of our hearth prayer is associated with the ceremony of *Eldborgs skål* 'Eldborg's toast' – a divinatory practice known in some parts of Norway and Sweden and which may once have been more widely distributed within Scandinavia (af Klintberg 2012, 72). It is accompanied in that context by a rider calling on God to protect both hearth and home from conflagration (and theft):

> Gud beware wårt hus från Eld och Brand och Thiufwe hand.
> (Celander 1931, 71)
>
> God protect our house from fire and conflagration and thieving hands.

Here we see introduced the shadowy figure of Eldborg cast in the role of a fire protectress just like the Virgin Mary and Brigit in the Gaelic context. With the pattern of her partnership with St Knut in mind, perhaps we may glimpse the potential for a

second female figure (Eldborg) to have featured in these proceedings in Scandinavian tradition, thus replicating the Gaelic model adverted to above. The combination of the elusive Eldborg of *Eldborgs skål* and the Virgin Mary in the centuries following the late arrival of Christianity in the Far North is one possibility; a linkage with some notable female figure of Nordic pagan times might be considered another. There is no evidence to support any such alignment as far as I know and this suggestion is made drawing mainly on the supposition that at some point the Nordic prayer for saving the fire may have featured a binary combination paralleling that of *Paidir Choigilt na Tine*.

One might suppose that the first pagan Viking visitors, arriving in Ireland some hundreds of years after it was Christianised, might well have had occasion to take cognizance of the similarity between Irish and Norse hearth protocols, perhaps especially in late winter or in the early spring period when Eldborg and Brigit stood in line for annual commemoration. Who is to say that in the Viking Age the *Paidir Choigilt na Tine* model was not replicated in the Nordic world (or parts thereof) in which case we might well suppose that none better than Eldborg would have been suited to take on Brigit's role. With whom she might have been partnered then – and subsequently in the earliest phase of Scandinavian Christianity – is another question.

In the end, because of changing domestic practices combined with other circumstances – language change in Ireland and the implementation of the Reformation in Scandinavia – hearth prayers in Ireland and Scandinavia ultimately shared the same fate. In post-Reformation Norway, Sweden and Swedish-speaking parts of Finland, however, a new form of words, involving sexually explicit secular rhymings – came into vogue. These – as af Klintberg has shown in his meticulous analysis of them – now also seem to have faded from memory.

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# ST JOHN'S PROLOGUE IN CHURCH RITUAL AND IRISH TRADITION

Pádraig Ó Héalaí*

The text of the first fourteen verses of St John's Gospel, the Prologue, written almost always by a priest in Latin on a piece of paper, was frequently employed as a charm in Ireland where it was known in the Irish language as *Leabhar Eoin* [John's book]. The paper was folded, sometimes in the shape of a triangle, often covered with cloth or leatherette, to which a string or ribbon was attached and then worn around the neck or stitched into the recipient's clothing or placed in his or her belongings. It was highly valued both as a safeguard against malign influences and as a remedy for their ill effects. The use of the Prologue both as a sacred text in church ritual and as a written artifact in folk tradition, is outlined in this contribution. The process of a revered scriptural passage morphing into a quasi-magical charm is traced and evidence of its eventual decline is noted.

**Church Ritual**

Due to its philosophical and indeed poetic formulation of the basic Christian tenet of the incarnation, John's Prologue enjoyed a very special place in Christian theological discourse and devotion. Its core message, *verbum caro factum est* ('the word was made flesh') – has been described from a believer's point of view, as 'a statement that means more for mankind than any sentence ever written by a human pen' (Leonard 1953, 981). It is not surprising then, to find this text (sometimes referred to by its opening words *In principio*) employed in liturgical settings. From an early period it was the gospel reading at the mass for Christmas Day (Law 1922, 211), and Atchley (1898) has noted its use in other liturgical ceremonies, such as the mass for the newly-baptised at Easter, in the ritual of the Last Rites in some medieval liturgies, and at the conclusion of the baptismal ceremony as a protection against epilepsy. Also referenced by him is its use in the rite

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of exorcism and in various blessings such as that for a new ship, a mother after childbirth, newly-weds, and again as a prayer to prevent fever, a usage already known to Anglo-Saxons (Tatlock 1914, 141).

In the course of the Middle Ages, it became customary for clergy to pronounce a blessing on the faithful at the end of mass, and from around the thirteenth century the Prologue began to be used as a reading in this blessing (Jungmann 1957, 147; Warren 1987, 268, note 188). The Sarum missal at the end of the fifteenth century stipulated the priest was to recite it on his way from the altar to the sacristy, while other missals specified its recital when unvesting (King 1957, 390–91). The Prologue was read in English at the conclusion of the Communion Service introduced in England in 1548 (Atchley 1898, 166), and it featured in the restructured ceremony, instituted by Henry VII, for the royal laying on of hands in curing the king's evil or scrofula (Duffy 1992, 216).

An increased demand for votive masses with specified gospels and prayers requested by supplicants is evidenced from the eleventh century, and this practice greatly promoted the use of John's Prologue. Since it was forbidden by church law to celebrate mass more than once a day, many members of the clergy were happy to accept an offering to celebrate an abbreviated form of the service—the so-called *missa sicca,* or dry mass (Palmer 1845, II:163–65). This rite omitted the offertory, consecration, and communion, but included with some other elements, the requested readings which most frequently featured John's Prologue.

The rise of the mendicant orders brought intensified exposure of the laity to the Prologue, as friars went from house to house seeking alms and commonly recited this text as a salutation, "a sort of magic incantation" (Fisher 1989, 14). Chaucer refers to this practice in the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* where he describes the success of the friar's sweet tones in getting the poor widow to part with her farthing "so plesaunt was his 'In principio'" (Robinson 1957, 19).

Significant impetus was given to the devotional use of John's Prologue at the beginning of the fourteenth century when Pope Clement V granted an indulgence of a year and forty days to anyone listening to the text and kissing some sacred object at the words *et verbum caro factum est.* Knowledge of this indulgence was widely propagated including the clarification that in the absence of a sacred object, kissing one's thumbnail would suffice to gain the indulgence (Duffy 1992, 215). Interestingly, this latter detail resonates with an Irish folk belief that nails were the most angelic part of the body.[1]

[1] An instance of this belief is given here in the author's translation: "Nails clipped from a child would never be thrown in the fire – neither would your own nails today as it's not right to throw them in the fire. They say this is the part of you that is most angelic, the part of you most closely associated with the angels, for the reason that however angry or mad you are, or however much you wish for revenge or any such thing, if you sit down and look at your nails for a while, you will forget about it." The original Irish-language form is in SVC 425: *Ní chaithfí go deo don tine ingne a bhearrfaí de leanbh, ná d'ingne féin inniu, ní ceart iad a chaitheamh don tine. Deir siad gur b'in é an chuid is mó dhuit atá i d'aingeal, an chuid is mó dhuit go bhfuil baint leis na haingil acu, mar pé fearg a bheidh ort nó pé buile a bheidh ort nó fonn díoltais a bheidh ort nó aon rud mar sin, má shuíonn tú síos agus féachaint ar d'ingne ar feadh tamaill, déanfair dearmad air.*

After the introduction of printing, the text was widely disseminated as it was included in prayer books for the laity which then became popular (Duffy 1992, 214–15). With the publication in 1570 of *The Roman Missal* in the aftermath of the Council of Trent, John's Prologue became an integral part of the Roman Catholic mass and it held this position in Catholic liturgy until removed from the body of the service following the liturgical reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council. In the reformed Eucharistic rite published in 1964, its role is confined to providing the gospel reading on the third mass on Christmas Day and on the second Sunday after Christmas.

**Popular Usage**

Not surprisingly, perhaps, given the hallowed position afforded John's Prologue in Christian ritual and catechesis, popular belief in its prophylactic and curative powers emerged from an early period. St Augustine mentions John's Prologue being placed on the head of a fever-stricken child to bring relief (*HdA* IV, 731–33), and in an indication of the esteem in which the Prologue was held, he tells of a Platonic philosopher who thought it appropriate that the text be written in gold lettering on the walls of every church (King 1957, 390). Giraldus Cambrensis records how a man afflicted by demons invariably got relief when the Prologue was placed on his chest (Sutherland 1975, 6–7), but he also castigates the widespread credence in the salutary power of certain votive gospel readings, and places *In principio* to the fore among them, berating the belief "that they were good physic, and drove away ghosts and phantoms, and especially powerful in this way was the beginning of John" (Atchley 1898, 163). In both its written and spoken form the text was availed of from medieval times for "all manner of curious, often superstitious, practices connected with it. People wrote it on amulets and wore it as a charm" (Law 1922, 212). Among its attested uses were providing protection or relief from the elements, from illness in humans and cattle, safeguarding against physical danger and malign supernatural beings or forces, and seeking to ensure success with crops or personal fortune (*HdA* IV, 731–33).

**Theological Debate**

The use of written formulae to afford protection against all manners of evil and to influence luck is, of course, a commonplace phenomenon**.** The use of gospel texts, but especially John's Prologue, for such purposes in Christian countries is paralleled by the use of venerated texts in other religious cultures, notably in Jewish and Muslim tradition, while in classical Greece and Rome, verses from Homer and Vergil were similarly employed (Thompson 1955–1958, D1273 *Magic formula (charm*); *HdA* II, 1086–89).

The wearing of phylacteries was roundly condemned by Christ on grounds of ostentation and hypocrisy (Mt 23:5–7), however, in later Christian tradition, it was the superstitious use of gospel texts that attracted the censure of religious authorities. Already in the fourth century there was criticism from church leaders of certain

practices in relation to the use made of these texts. St Jerome pointed out that there was no merit in wearing a sacred text about the neck unless its message was also inscribed in one's heart (Skemer 2006, 36, note 46). Early in the eleventh century, the Synod of Seligenstadt condemned the inappropriate use of John's Prologue, especially by matrons (Atchley 1898, 161), and a work on witchcraft dating from c.1300, instances of the misuse of the text for the purpose of overcoming infertility. It lists such measures as placing the testicles of a rooster under the marriage bed or smearing the bedroom walls with the blood of a black dog, but in extreme cases, it recommends that the opening verses of John be written out and the paper placed in liquid which the couple then drinks (Kieckhefer 1989, 85).

Just as earlier theologians had decried the inappropriate use of the Prologue, so too Reformation theologians directed their ire at practices associated with the Prologue, which they deemed superstitious or blasphemous. The Elizabethan Calvinist, James Calfhill, for instance, in answer to his own question: "Who were the vilest witches and sorcerers of the earth?" replies: "the priests that consecrate crosses and ashes, water and salt, oil and cream, boughs and bones… that give St John's Gospel to hang about mens's necks" (Thomas 1978, 60). Bishop Joseph Hall refers to the fatuous belief in the power of the Prologue "printed in a small roundel and sold to the credulous ignorants with this fond warrant, that whosoever carries it about with him shall be free from the danger of the day's mishaps" (Thomas 1978, 34). William Tyndale is scathing on practices associated with it:

> thousands, while the priest pattereth St John's Gospel in Latin over their head, [cross] themselves with a legion of crosses behind and before, and with reverence, on the very arses and pluck up their legs and cross so much as their heels and the very soles of their feet, and believe that if it be done in the time that he readeth the Gospel (and else not) that there shall be no mischance happen them that day because only of those crosses.
> (Duffy 1992, 215–16)

The orthodox teaching of the Catholic Church allowed for the employment of sacred objects to obtain worldly favours, provided the objects were treated reverentially, and the effect attributed to their inherent sacredness**.** Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologica* (II.2.96.4) upheld the propriety of using the text of gospel passages for worldly benefit, stating that the word of God was not less powerful in its written than in its spoken form. As it was proper to heal the sick and ward off evil by speaking the word of God, so also he argued, was it proper to seek these ends by employing the word of God in its written form and by wearing it about the person. This orthodox view is echoed in Counter-Reformation Irish catechisms where the question whether the use made of John's prologue is superstition, is answered in the negative, and its efficacy is said to be affirmed by the blessing of the church (Ó Fachtna 1953, II:2178–81; Ó Súilleabháin 1962, II:1377–80).

**Some Literary References to the Use of the Prologue**

The eleventh-century text, *Aislinge Meic Conglinne* [The Vision of Mac Conglinne], provides the earliest instance of scripture passages being used for prophylactic purposes in Ireland. This satirical work describes how gospel texts were hung about the neck of one embarking on a journey as a safeguard against mishaps and evil spirits. The text does not specify which gospel passages were employed, but given the widespread contemporary belief in the miraculous efficacy of the Prologue, it is probably safe to assume (with the first editor of the text) that this passage was among them (Meyer 1892, 195).

The Prologue is referred to as a cure for the evil eye in a fifteenth-century Irish-language medical treatise (Ó Siochfhradha 1939, 165), and the Elizabethan historian, William Camden, records its use in safeguarding children in Ireland:

> If the infant is sick they sprinkle it with the stalest urine they can get, and for a preservative against mischances, they hang not only the beginning of St. John's Gospel about the child's neck, but also a crooked nail out of a horse's foot or a piece of wolf's skin. (Camden 1722, 1418)

A further record of its use is found in the evidence given at one of the infrequent witch trials held in Ireland – this as late as 1711 – where it is stated that John's Prologue was used by a victim as a protective measure against the witchcraft directed against her by seven accused women (Seymour 1989, 216). A century later its employment as a cure for epilepsy is recorded:

> The epileptic is brought with great solemnity before the priest, who prays over him, and then throws round his neck an amulet, or little silken bag, containing a slip of paper on which is written the following verse from the first chapter of the gospel of St. John. 'In the beginning was the word and the word was with God, and the word was God.' This remedy is in almost equal repute with the low Protestant and Catholic. (Gamble 1813, 325–26)[2]

The lyricist Thomas Moore (born 1779), recalls how his mother hung a gospel around his neck when he was leaving home as a young man (Joyce 1903, I:386), and the pioneering folklore collector, Thomas Crofton Croker, asserts that "few Irish peasants will be found without a Gospel" (Croker 1828, II:163). The Prologue features as a protective measure in the writings of William Carleton (Harmon 1973, 63), who also gives a lively description of a noted shanachie and religious debater's use of the Greek text of opening verses of John's gospel to deliver the *coup de grâce* to his opponents:

> Where an English quotation failed, he threw in one in Irish; and where that was understood, he posed them with a Latin one, closing his quotation by desiring them to give a translation of it; if this too were accomplished, he rattled out the five or six first verses of John in Greek, which some one had taught him, and as this was generally beyond their reading, it usually closed the discussion in his favour. (Carleton 1841, 379)

[2] I am grateful to Professor Séamas Ó Catháin for this reference.

The biographer of the political activist, John Blake Dillon, records how as a fugitive on the Aran Islands, disguised as a priest in the wake of the 1848 uprising, Dillon had to react quickly to maintain his cover when requested by an islander to provide him with a gospel for a sick child (O'Cathaoir 1990, 94). References to the Prologue in the writings of the acclaimed Irish-language author, Máirtín Ó Cadhain, are discussed in Ó Máille (1974), and in Ó Crualaoich (2019), where jocular treatments of the text by traditional poets are also analysed. References to the Prologue in the National Folklore Collection are reviewed below.

**Decline in Recourse to the Prologue**

In the course of the second half of the nineteenth century popular recourse to John's Prologue was in decline. Its use as a religious amulet was seriously undermined as a consequence of the so-called 'devotional revolution' promoted in the Catholic church in Ireland in the post-famine period. A concerted effort was then made to bring Irish pastoral and devotional practice into line with that current in continental Catholic countries (Larkin 1976, 57–89; McGrath 1990). As part of this process, wearing an Agnus Dei medal and a scapular was promoted, and the faithful were encouraged to place their trust in these items when seeking divine assistance in everyday life but especially in times of personal anguish. At parish missions throughout the country they were made readily available from stalls selling religious goods, and they could also be purchased from some retail outlets (Lysaght 1994). No such institutional support sustained the use of John's Prologue, and given that the cost of a medal or scapular was much less than the offering expected by a priest for providing the gospel text, it is not surprising that demand for the latter decreased.

An anecdote from a West-Kerry storyteller illustrates the monetary benefit and the greater privacy involved in acquiring a scapular rather than a Prologue, while also implying a conservative belief in the greater power of the Prologue:

> This girl from the Dingle area was sick one time in America and she wrote home to her father asking him to send her John's Prologue. He never went near a priest or a church and what he did was send her a scapular rather than the Prologue. She was none too pleased at this and she wrote back to him: "It's a pity you didn't drink the two pence you spent on it."[3]

The transition from the older reliance on *Leabhar Eoin* to the more recent use of the scapular is reflected in a contemporary observation by a social historian that "many Roman Catholics now wear a gospel or scapular round the neck, not only when on a journey but constantly" (Joyce 1903, I:86).

[3] Author's translation of Tyers 1992, 66: *Bhí an cailín seo ó cheantar an Daingin breoite tráth [i Meireiceá] agus scríobh sí abhaile go dtí a hathair á iarraidh air an Leabhar Eoin a chur chuici. Ní théadh seisean i ngoire sagairt ná séipéil agus is é an rud a rinne sé ná scaifléir a chur chuici in ionad an Leabhar Eoin. Ní róbhuíoch a bhí sí de agus scríobh sí chuige arís: "Is mairg nár ólais an dá phingin a thugais orthu," a dúirt sí.*

The terminology employed in some records in the National Folklore Collection reflects the decline in popular acquaintance with the Prologue. For instance, in an Irish-language variant of ATU 934, *Tales of Predestined Death*, the piece of paper on which the prophecy is written is incorrectly referred to as *Leabhar Eoin*, and in an English-language variant of the tale, that same paper is referred to as a 'gospel' (Ó Duilearga and Ó hÓgáin 1981, 143–58; NFC 82, 162). Some Irish-speaking informants in South Kerry refer to the Prologue not as *Leabhar Eoin* but as *leabharán* ('little book'), and one goes on to say that no priest now provides it (NFC 27, 557–64; NFC 367, 202–3). A Galway informant refers to it as *leabhar an bhaiste* ('baptismal book') and a collector there wrote it as *leabhar uain* ('book of a lamb'), thus indicating that for both some informants and collectors *Leabhar Eoin* had lost its original meaning, specifically its association with the gospel of St John (NFC 111, 129; NFC 1797, 3–4). In referring to the word 'gospel' used by an informant as a protection against nightmares, a collector explains it as "a local name for an Agnus Dei" (NFC 433, 47–49).

> Originally, the Agnus Dei amulet consisted of a disk made of wax from a paschal candle, impressed with an image of a lamb bearing a cross or flag as a symbol of Christ, blessed by the pope, and then worn on the person to provide protection. But what is generally referred to as an Agnus Dei in Irish tradition consists of a tiny portion of wax from a proper Agnus Dei, placed together with a text of John's Prologue in miniscule print in a cloth or leatherette pouch, such as those still provided by the Poor Clare nuns. Because thus frequently bundled together and sharing a similar function, the terms Agnus Dei and gospel became interchangeable in popular speech.

The decline in the tradition associated with John's Prologue is also evident in recent Irish-language lexicography. Dinneen in his Irish—English dictionary, explains the term Leabhar Eoin not as a written text, but as "a 'gospel,' that is a medal containing the opening words of the Gospel of St John worn as a protection from evil" (Dinneen 1927, *s.v.* "leabhar"). A glossary of Irish words from Co. Clare compiled by a priest describes it as *leabhar beag beannaithe* ('a small holy book'), a description indicative of the author's lack of awareness of the tradition associated with it.[4]

Finally, in a glossary of words from Co. Galway, the demise of the tradition is expressly referred to by an informant in describing *Leabhar Eoin* as:

[4] Mac Clúin 1940, I:*s.v.* Eoin. An earlier incidence of clerical unfamiliarity with the tradition is evidenced in a letter sent by a priest in Argyll to his bishop in 1840 seeking guidance in relation to requests he had received for 'gospels:' "The fact is, however, that I am ignorant of how a gospel is given, to whom it should be given, and under what conditions it should be given as I can find no mention of this practice in any of my books" (Campbell 1975, 68). Recent clerical training seems to have disregarded this aspect of popular devotion as the present author learned to his embarrassment, when a young priest in the mid nineteen-sixties in Co. Kerry, he was asked for a *Leabhar Eoin* by a mother of a sick child, and had to admit sheepishly he had never heard of it.

> A piece or two of paper you would get from a priest to sew in you clothing as a cure. Once in every ten years would you now hear of *Leabhar Eoin*, and there are many people of advanced age who never saw one.[5]

The great majority of items concerning *Leabhar Eoin* indexed in the Irish Folklore Collection come from the Irish-speaking areas of Munster or Connaught. As with other aspects of tradition, its use persisted longest in these linguistically conservative districts, but even in these, by the mid-twentieth century, recourse to it had become very uncommon. In Irish-speaking parts of Donegal, however, a more vibrant practice called an *oifig* ('office') parallels the usage of *Leabhar Eoin*. The 'office' derives from the medieval practice of supplicants requesting for their personal intentions, specified readings or prayers from the daily 'liturgy of the hours' or 'divine office' incumbent on the higher clergy. In later tradition, as part of the ritual, the priest blessed some salt which he gave to the supplicant. This was believed to possess protective and curative powers, and in turn, was itself also referred to as an 'office.'

**Popular Beliefs Relating to the Prologue**

Despite the orthodox teaching on the proper use of sacred objects being long disseminated in Ireland, it is clear from oral tradition that influences other than church catechesis had a bearing on popular notions concerning the Prologue. Beliefs and usage in relation to other written formulae, current in Irish tradition, and employed for magical effect, may well have coloured attitudes to the Prologue. As has been pointed out by Boyle (2021), however, it can not be assumed that such popular beliefs and practices are instances of pagan survival, or were perceived as opposing Christian doctrine by those who accepted and engaged in them:

> Thus, the use of a charm for healing purposes, for example, was not a 'pagan survival', preserving knowledge that was beyond, or contrary to, the Christian Church, but rather something that can be entirely understood within a Christian social and educational context (Boyle 2021, 430-31)

The prized status of written charms in Irish traditional healing can be gauged from the following account by an informant:

> There wasn't a charm that ever was she didn't know and had sewn into the tucks of her petticoat… The woman seen with a tuck in her petticoat would be said to be fairly good, as would the woman seen with two; but if four or five tucks were seen in her petticoat, it would be said of her that she had every charm and cure that ever existed.[6]

[5] Author's translation of Ó Máille 1974, *s.v.* Eoin: *Píosa páipéir nó cúpla píosa, a gheobhfá ón sagart le fuáil in do chuid éadaí le haghaidh leighis. Uair sa deich mbliain a chloisfeá caint ar an Leabhar Eoin, is tá go leor daoine in aois mhaith nach bhfaca ceann ariamh.*

[6] Author's translation of NFC 1325, 563–64: *Ní raibh aon ortha riamh nach raibh aici agus iad fuaite sna tuckanna a bhí ina petticoat … An bhean a bhfeicfí tuck ina petticoat, d'abrófaí go raibh sí sin go measartha, agus*

The revered status of scripture in the Christian church did not safeguard it from inappropriate use, and medieval Lives of Irish saints contain numerous references to the superstitious use of sacred objects such as bells, staffs and gospels (Plummer 1910, I:clxxiv–clxxxi). A further instance that might be cited in this context was the practice of soaking a copy of the four gospels in water given as a cure to a sick animal (de Paor 1967, 5). The prominence of the Prologue in religious settings may indeed have made its inappropriate use all the more likely. Belief in the value of its role in church rites could easily translate to a belief in its efficacy in secular matters, and the fact that it was written by a priest in a strange but highly regarded language, was calculated to increase its numinous potency in the popular mind.

Lore relating to the Prologue in recent oral tradition clearly suggests superstitious attitudes to it. There are frequent expressions, for instance, of the notion that the efficacy of the Prologue depends on the status of the writer, rather than on the power of the scriptural text or the blessing attached to it. The belief in the greater power of a Prologue written by one individual rather than another, underlies the words of an informant who declared the Prologue could work wonders "provided you got the right one,"[7] a statement contrasting sharply with that of the orthodox medieval canonist, Durandus, who declared the gospel possesses power *sua virtute* (Atchley 1898, 170). Some variants of the migratory legend designated ML 3026* *Contest between magicians* in Briggs (1971), tell of two priests competing to demonstrate the superior power of their individual Prologues, by throwing them on a fire from which one emerges unscathed (NFC 367, 201–6; Ó Siochfhradha 1932, 324 #22; Mac Giollarnáth 1944, 198–99). A measure of the intensity of belief on the part of some informants in the Prologue's resistance to fire may be gauged from a memorat telling how its survival in a blaze was witnessed by the teller (NFC 979, 136–38). It was believed that the Prologue was more effective if requested from a priest rather than offered by him, and that it lacked potency unless paid for (NFC 968, 117). Tradition had it that the Prologue would bring harm to its recipient in the event of the priest making an error in writing it (NFC 979, 204–5), paralleling a popular belief in the negative consequences for the recipient of baptism should a mishap or error occur in the performance of the ceremony (Ó Héalaí 2022, 235–36). A belief that the efficacy of the text can be tailored to match the demands likely to be made on it is demonstrated in a legend here summarised as follows:

> a priest writes a Prologue for the father of a sick daughter but takes it back on hearing the father is likely to encounter an evil spirit on his way home, and immediately writes another capable of warding off the expected attack. (NFC 27, 557–64)

In addition to its protective and curative functions, the Prologue was employed for clairvoyance in seeking to discover the location of a drowned body. In this usage, a

*an bhean a bhfeicfí dhá cheann ina petticoat, ach dá bhfeicfí ceithre cinn agus cúig cinn ina petticoat déarfaí nach raibh aon ortha dá ndearnadh riamh ná aon leigheas nach raibh ag an mnaoi sin.*

[7] NFC 968, 117: *Tá obair sa Leabhar Eoin má fhaigheann tú an ceann ceart acu.*

priest placed the written text of the Prologue in a sheaf of oats which was then floated on the water in the expectation of it coming to rest over the body.[8] Lastly, the notion of limited good which is so frequently evident in accounts of traditional, and especially magical, healing, also finds expression in relation to cures effected by means of the Prologue:

> It is said that a priest who had cured somebody with a *Leabhar Eoin* would himself suffer in some way thereafter — that he would become insane or that he would die or suffer some tragedy.[9]

**Conclusion**

Legends of a competition between priests regarding the efficacy of their respective Prologues, betray the usual folklore bias favouring the underdog — in this instance, the curate, who is often more aligned with popular worldview, as against the parish priest who is more representative of the official church. In a related legend, a layman is the underdog, as a Prologue he has written remains unharmed when placed in a fire by a priest (*Béaloideas* 14, 198–99). A wise woman is shown to be more knowledgeable and skilful than the priest regarding the Prologue according to a legend that demonstrates her awareness of blunders in the text he has written (NFC 1797, 2–3). It seems reasonable to view these items that highlight lay proficiency in relation to *Leabhar Eoin*, as expressions of an underlying popular desire for access to supernatural power from more than one source.[10]

Legends and beliefs relating to the Prologue form part of a larger complex of Irish traditional lore that exalts the power of the priest and validates the efficacy of religious emblems. This material sustained and reenforced people's faith, and was conducive to continued recourse to the Prologue, a practice which was, of course, economically beneficial to the clergy. Indeed, the required offering may have occasioned, or at least sustained, the proverb, *Deireadh gach soiscéil an t-airgead* ('money is the conclusion to every gospel') (Ó Siochfhradha 1926, #949).

Finally, it is appropriate to acknowledge the beneficial role the *Leabhar Eoin* played in providing reassurance and hope to many Irish people in times of illness and personal distress.

* An Irish-language version of the article has appeared in Pádraig Ó Héalaí. 2022, "An Leabhar Eoin—idir Dheabhóid agus Phiseogacht," in *Snátha den Seansaol. Aistí ar*

[8] Personal communication from Tomás Ó Mainín of Ballyferriter, Co. Kerry, 1 November 2003. The text of the Ave Maria, or a blessed candle, placed in a sheaf were more frequently employed for this purpose, see NFC 24, 199–202, 357; NFC 37, 91; Laoide 1915, 51; O'Toole 2003, 244.

[9] Author's translation of Tyers 1992, 63: *Tá sé ráite an sagart a leigheasfadh duine leis an Leabhar Eoin go n-imeodh rud éigin air féin go luath ina dhiaidh, go rachadh sé as a mheabhair nó go gcaillfí é nó go mbainfeadh tubaiste de shórt éigin dó.*

[10] Tension in Irish tradition between clergy and laity in relation the exercise of supernatural power is further explored in Ó Héalaí 2022, 259–76.

*bhealoideas an Bhlascaoid agus na míntíre. Strands of Traditional Life. Essays on Blasket and Mainland Folklore*, edited by Pádraig Ó Héalaí, 417–34. Martello.

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# ARTICULATING STRONG WORDS AND THE NECESSITY OF ACCOMPANYING ACTION: CHARMS, RITUAL AGENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Catharina Raudvere*

The charms written down in pre-industrial Scandinavia can be studied as answers to both practical and existential challenges. Crop failure caused famine among people and cattle, and the spread of illnesses was difficult to explain, all causing a sense of exposure to powers almost impossible to control. The following is a reading of a Danish charm that points to how the spoken word could offer relief in times of difficulties by intersecting Biblical narratives in a distinct Nordic context. This perspective is inspired by Terry Gunnell's contributions to the interdisciplinary field where folklore, history of religions and Old Norse Studies meet – with performance at the centre of his studies and the historical agents very much coming alive (Gunnell 2018).

**To Put Trust in the Spoken Word**

The major Danish edition of charms was published by Ferdinand Ohrt as *Danmarks Trylleformler* (1917–21), and he later produced supplementary volumes. While many of his contemporaneous colleagues were engaged in collecting oral literature in different corners of Europe, Ohrt was more historically oriented and his research kept him focused on the archives.

Ohrt's primary interest was more in the motifs in the charms and less in the practitioners or the ritual acts that accompanied the spoken word. In Ohrt's supplementary study *Da signed Krist* (1927), charms are classified according to the narrative outline of the Bible. The structure provides a telling instance for the modern reader of what a governing force classification is and how swiftly an archive record can be disconnected from its initial time and place, far away from people's concrete challenges. Ohrt covers many details, from the patriarchs to demons like Lilith before

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moving on to the New Testament and an extensive chapter on the Virgin Mary. This is followed by several chapters on Jesus, organised from infanthood to resurrection. Thereafter, the roles of angels and saints are presented, and only at the very end, a short chapter appears on "hedenskab."

Ohrt regarded the charms as a form of Christian interaction: "den Kundskap som Danmarks Signelser og Besværgelser ('Trylleformler') giver om kristen Folketro eller 'lavkirkelig' Tro i Middelalderen og senere" (1927, 7). Our Heavenly Father, Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints populate many of the Nordic charms and are approached with petitions for support by those who are skilled in articulating powerful words.

In 1875, the following was documented from northern Jutland:

> FORMULAR AT BRUGE MOD HEXERI, "FORGJÖRELSE," I ALMINDELIGHED
>
> Nu i Jesu Christi Navn, du almægtige Abrahams Gud og Isaks Gud og Jacobs Gud, giv mig nu Naade og bevar mig naadeligen og bönhør mig naadeligen paa denne min Beden for Jesu Christi Skyld, som lod sig føde i en Oxestald blandt Kreaturer og Bæster, saa de maatte se ham; men se du nu naadeligt til os i vor Elendighed med vores Kreaturer og Bæster, Føl, Køer, Kalve, Faar, Svin, Gæs og med hvad Navn det nævnes kan, og Jordens Grøde, og det naadeligen velsigne fra alle onde Öjne, som komme fra Djævelens og Troldmenneskers og deres Kunster med deres Trolddom! Saa bedes du, almægtige Gud, at du vil være vor Skjold og Beskjærmelse og velsigne os fra alle de Troldmennesker og fra Djævelens Forgjörelse,som disse Kreaturer kan være paalagt, at de forbistrede Troldmennesker ikke skal have Magt i vore Huse og Gaarde, i hvad Materie det være kan eller hvad Kulør det have kan. Stat os bi med din Hjælp og beskjærm os fra alle onde Mennesker og fra Djævelens Trolddomsforgjörelse, som Kreaturerne kan være paalagt af de forbandede Troldmennesker her i vore Huse og Gaarde, i hvad Maade det er gjort, og med hvad Navn det nævenes kan, og i hvad Materie det er, i Guld, Sølv, Staal, Kobber, Messing, Tin eller Bly, eller om det er udi Træ eller i nogen aaben Revne indsat, eller nogen Steder udi Husene indsat ude eller inde, eller udi Gaarden eller Gaardens Grund eller Ejendom, Ager eller Eng, eller om det er Sten udi Huller indsaat, eller om det er udi Jorden nedgravet, eller om det skulde være gjort i Ilden, Vinden eller i Vandet, i Diger eller paa Kirkegaarden udi døde Menneskers Ben indsat eller knøt i Knuder inde i Huset eller ude i Gaarden, da skal de selv opløse den Strop, o Herre Jesu Christ, for det Baand Skyld, som du selv blev bunden med, det baade Djævelen og Verden kunde frygte, for det uskyldige Blod som flød af dig paa Korset, og for Lammets Blod som udstedt (?) imellem Templet og Alteret og oplod Gud Faders Velsignelse, saa fri og frels dine i Jesu Christi Navn. Og alt det som er bunden eller knøt i Husene eller i Gaarden, som kan være begravet eller nedsat til at fordærve Mennesker eller andre Kreaturer eller andre Ting med, som den tilhører, tag det selv, Herre Jesu Christ, for din Pine og Døds Skyld, for din Himmelfarts Skyld; hjælp kære Herre Gud, fra alle Troldmennesker og deres Fordærvelse! (Ohrt 1917, 458).[1]

[1] In this translation, "witches" is used for the broader Danish term *troldmennesker*.
FORMULA TO BE USED AGAINST WITCHCRAFT, "BEWITCHMENT", IN GENERAL
Now in the name of Jesus Christ, you, almighty God of Abraham and God of Isak and God of Jakob, provide me mercy and mercily protect me and mercily hear this my prayer for the sake of Jesus Christ, who let himself be born in an oxen barn among cattle and animals so that they may see him; but look upon us now mercily in our misery with our cattle and animals, foals, cows, calves, sheep, swine, geese and with what name it could be named, and the harvest of the earth, mercily bless from all the evil eyes

This charm asks for protection from concrete but as-of-yet materialised dangers. The prayer is commenced by an invocation that calls for attention and help: "Nu i Jesu Christi Navn, du almægtige Abrahams Gud og Isaks Gud og Jacobs Gud." Invocations are frequent in numerous prayers, blessings, curses, songs and liturgies. Such formulations establish the necessary relationship between the speaker and those forces who are addressed for their potential to assist and/or reveal. From a narrative perspective, invocations provide a possibility for the performer to present a scene in which the most important agents and the basic concerns appear. In this case, the words are direct speech in the name of Christ aimed at the almighty God, who is the Lord of the prophets in the Old Testament. Hence, the prophetic genealogy and the first of several repetitive parts of the spell, which beside giving rhythm and framing, underlines the pious discourse of the charm. References to both the Old and the New Covenant in the Bible reappear further down in the text. With this beginning, the fundamental logic of the charm is established, without which the incantation cannot work.

The speaking subject, which immediately makes itself known in the first person and transmits the words, prays heartily for God's mercy to stand up against evil, "bönhør mig naadeligen," only to shift to more inclusive forms (we, us, our), though the voice of the text comes distinctly from the praying individual. This charm is different from many other Danish incantations as it identifies the cosmological origin of evil and prescribes very concrete healing techniques. The impetus could be an immediate threat to the welfare of people and animals on the farm described in the charm. The purpose of a charm is both to ward off and to explain the root of the problem. In the quoted example, an instrumental solution is at the heart of the matter but is supplemented with trust in the spoken word, "min Beden." The formula connects to a specific local repertoire, an oral genre convention, where verbal and ritual performance were intertwined. The formula is also based on a specific poetic repertoire with repetitions, enumerations,

that come from the Devil and witches, and their acts of witchcraft! You almighty God are asked to be our shield and protection and bless us all from the witches and from the bewitchment of the Devil which might have been put on the cattle and that the damned witches should not have power in our houses and yards, in whatever material it might be or whatever colour it might have. Your help shall come unto us and protect us from all evil people and from the bewitchment of the Devil that can have been put by evil witches here in our houses and yards, in what manner it might have been done, and with what name it might be named, in what material it might come, in gold, silver, steel, copper, brass, tin or lead, or if it is wood or put in some open crack, or some place inside or outside the house, or in the yard or in the foundation of the farm or property, field or meadow, or if it is stone put in holes or dug down in the soil, or if it is made in the fire, the wind or in the water, in ditches, or on the cemetery put in the bones from dead people or tied in knots inside the house or outside in the yard, then they shall themselves open that strap, oh Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of the strap with which you yourself were tied, what both the Devil and the world could fear, because of the innocent blood that flowed from you on the cross, and for the blood of the Lamb which was shed between the temple and the altar and opened the blessing of God Father, so set us free and save us in the name of Jesus Christ. And all that is bound or knotted in the houses or the yard that can be buried or put into the ground to destroy people or other creatures or other items that belong take it yourself, Lord Jesus Christ, for the sake of your pain and death, for the sake of your accension; help dear Lord God, against all witches and their depravity.

parallelisms with intertextual references, analogies and direct speech (often formulated as confrontations that do not shy away from the true circumstances). These are mostly mediated in the vernacular but with Latin terms, corrupted- or pseudo-Latin expressions. Some are detailed in their verbal construction, while others are a swift blend of words and expressions thought to have influence (Roper 2004; Borsje 2014; 2017). The parallelisms are already apparent in the invocation with its reference to the birth of Jesus among the cattle in the stable, as well as towards the end of the text pointing to his sacrificial death. How stable the charm forms were is hard to judge. Some incantations only have minor variations and are frequent in the Nordic archives. Others seem to be highly individual constructions, where the performer gets an opportunity to extemporise in relation to the healing situation with elements of playfulness and verbal creativity.

As a model, there are narratives in the New Testament about Jesus as a healer who could expel evil spirits and even raise the dead. It is a telling example of how a historiola works with a scene from a myth or legend that provides the solution to the presented problem – e.g., the effect of the charm – by setting a frame for a well-known environment to mirror the performance situation (Frankfurter 1995). The historiola is more than an intertextual reference; as the performance develops, it supports the legitimacy on which the healer builds his/her authority. The notion that disease is an outside attack that can be reversed is the same as in the Bible (Kanerva 2015). When Jesus meets two possessed people, he confronts the evil spirits that torment them. By means of words, he is able to drive the demons out of their bodies. Resen and Svane's Bible translation that generations of Danes heard or read in several revisions over the centuries reads: "Og han sade til dem: "Gaar!" Men de fore ud og fore i Svinerne; og se hele Hjorden styrtede sig ned over Brinken ud i Søen og døde i Vandet" (Matthew 8:32). An example of a classic historiola that appears in many healing charms and of how seemingly contradictory worldviews are entangled in Nordic folklore.

Only a few lines into the charm, it is already clear that even if the opening is directed towards God, it is not formulated in an ecclesiastical context. As preparation for action, the charm defines who is threatened, what substances and objects have the quality to protect and gives examples of what techniques with which cunning people are suspected to operate. The situation demands a person with similar expertise to revert or meet "onde Mennesker og Djævelens Trolddomsforgjörelse."

By being attentive to the verbs, nouns and adjectives, the worldview that provided the logic for the charm can be approached (Stark 2006; Amundsen 2012; Ryan et al. 2013). In such an imaginary, evil thoughts can take material form. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, both God and his opponent have been involved as prominent figures in the struggle between the powers of light and darkness. The first thing that is asked for in the charm is grace, and thereafter "naadeligen" is repeated three times. God is approached by means of exhortations to "bevar" and "bönhør," and to let "min Beden" have the expected influence. Such a wish includes the whole of the Christian salvation narrative, as it alludes to atonement through Christ's sacrificial death and the "uskyldige Blod som flød af dig paa Korset, og for Lammets Blod." Even though it was not

sanctioned by the Church, this charm is to a great extent a Christian text. "Troldene" are the evil-minded individuals who act with hidden methods. The source of the destructive powers places them in specific discursive categories, above all, those who are directly associated with the Devil. Even if the Lord of Darkness is the source of all malevolence, it is wicked human agents who constitute the threat to life on the farm of the speaker. They are called "forbandede Troldmennesker," "onde Mennesker," and they have the capacity to perform "Forgjörelse" or commit "Trolddom" and "Fordærvelse." There are other, more abstract entities active, such as "onde Öjne" and "Magt," though the dark origin is always the same.

Formulations in a ritual performance have agents both inside and outside the text. The relation between the textual agents in the universe of the charm and its implicit labourers – those who once could have uttered the charm or been the recipients of the care of a healer according to local religious practice – is blurred, yet dynamic. The latter are sometimes visible as part of the commentaries made by the collector or the editor. Such comments are, in practice, interpretations that govern the reading of a charm long after that the oral text was transformed into a written script and the performance became an archived document.

The voices in a text are not necessarily the same as those of its agents. Aside from the voice that is heard throughout the charm and who speaks in the form of a monologue without interruption of other voices, there are other important agents. There are those who, when the charm begins, may have already acted with bad intentions and a destructive impact on the situation. In short, there are those one could fear will take further action, and those from whom one asks for help. Voices in direct speech can be the same as those of the agents, but first and foremost, the agents are the figures that stand behind the deeds that have had consequences in the past and which could also affect the future. Here lies the possibility for success for the one who uses the spoken word to stop the perils of the evil-minded. Except for the verbal competence, another characteristic feature for people thought to have the potential to both send and reverse destructive attacks is their clear-sightedness. It is the gaze that can reach beyond the possibilities of everyday life, looking back in time and into the future. With such references, a performer could intertwine time and space, as well as causation. The whole body is an active component in the charms as part of rituals and as textual elements; limbs and corporal functions were a vital part of a worldview that made *trolldom* a relevant explanatory model.

With its detailed introductory section, the charms presents a distinct persona who identifies threats against people and cattle. The charm is dominated by one voice in the first person – possibly on behalf of somebody who has asked for the charm to be performed. In this specific charm, it is impossible to determine whether the voice in the text is supposed to come from a ritual specialist or an individual in distress. From a performative perspective, this flexibility makes the text even more operational. In his analysis of some Norwegian charms, Leif Søndergaard (2017) applies Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and discursive variation (heteroglossia), underlining the Christian content and the charms as tools to handle precarious problems. To Søndergaard, the voices in

the text are not the main point, but that the discourse about what makes the varying agents and differing frames of understanding stand out more clearly. Bakhtin (1981, 150) wrote:

> the fantastic in folklore is a *realistic* fantastic: in no way does it exceed the limits of the real, here-and-now material world, and it does not stitch together rents in that world with anything that is idealistic or other-worldly, it works with the ordinary expanses of time and space and experiences these expanses and utilizes them in great breadth and depth.

For Bakhtin, all texts are polyphonic which gives seemingly simple texts their dynamics and opens them to a multiplicity of readings in both the past and present. Together with heteroglossia, this conceptualisation points to how a singular text can represent radically different ideological and religious stances.

The primary conflict in the charm above is the relation between the addressed almighty God (and later Christ) and their opponent the Devil and in his vicinity "de forbandede Troldmennesker," who have received their "Kunster" from him. There are, however, more figures on the scene. The dead appear as instrumental to those with clandestine knowledge, and the cattle and animals need protection. The purpose of the agents is to fend off evil and is to a great extent mediated by the choice of verbs. To bind and to knot, appearing further down in the charm, are verbs recurring in texts that relate magic, as do bless, conjure, read, exhort and command. These verbs allude to distinct practices – both regarding the conceptualisation of how evil was sent and how to reverse it: "alt det som er bunden eller knøt i Husene eller i Gaarden" and continues with a historiola that hints at a counter-ritual where the central verb points to the opposite of to knot and tie: "da skal de selv opløse den Strop, o Herre Jesu Christ, for det Baand Skyld, som du selv blev bunden med, det baade Djævelen og Verden kunde frygte, for det uskyldige Blod." To untie a knot is a general image for solving a problem and becomes directly connected to the history of salvation and strengthens the Christian character of the charm.

The charm comprises a narrative that visualises a ritual process and its spatial frame. The ritual scenes in Danish folk belief texts are domestic spaces and most often the farm, i.e., amidst everyday life where the worries are situated. It can be questioned whether the charm above was ever performed verbatim as it appears in Ohrt's collection. Nevertheless, it presents an environment recognisable as rural Scandinavia. The epicentre is the farm, and people live side by side with the animals. The only religious space from the historical context mentioned is the churchyard, not the church as such. In Nordic texts about magic, in both charms and folk legends, the burial place signifies a border zone between the living and the dead. Therefore, is it a space for communication with otherworldly beings and the dead, and a place for rituals – at least according to the archived documents. Or, was it simply an epitomic place in a narrative about clandestine knowledge? It is not possible to determine in detail whether the substances mentioned in the charm were regarded as effective as such (all of them frequently occur in folklore collections of spells and legends), or if it is their semantic value that should be emphasised. At the Danish Folklore Archive, there are numerous

examples of what substances could be utilised against attacks of evil and envy (Christiansen 2013). As expressed in the quoted charm: "i hvad Materie det være kan eller hvad Kulør det have kan." With its signs and references, charms are a part of a shared repertoire that both practitioners and their patients had access to when making sense of the world.

Temporality is another vital part of the construction of a charm in relation to how chronology itself was conceptualised and how the narrative sequences structure consistency between conflicts and scenes. With the short expression "mellem Templet og Alteret," a long passage of time is identified: from the early period of the Jewish religion of the Hebrew Bible centred around the temple in Jerusalem to the time of Christianity and what was the ritual horizon for those who used the spell, e.g., the Lutheran service where the altar represents Christ's sacrifice. From the individual's horizon, the grave plays a significant role in the end of the charm and defines the individual life cycle. Legends and charms provide ways of telling that connect the past, present and future. Temporality – in terms of linear sequences and how several timelines can work simultaneously in one narrative – is very obvious in texts dealing with clandestine knowledge. A leap is taken from the fundamental conflict since the fall of Adam and Eve into the future peace that can only be found on the other side of the grave. A close reading of the charm extends the image of rural living conditions in a most concrete way. The discursive persona who speaks in the text places the conflicts in a cosmic battle between God and the Devil, whose domains extend into people's lives. In this spell, no cosmological topography with heaven and hell is presented with separated realms in a universe of the kind we can see in mural paintings in Scandinavian churches. Here, both the dark forces and comfort are found in the immediate vicinity.

**The Turn from Despair to Self-Confidence**

The closure of the charm is constructed as a pendant to the introduction and underlines the charm as a whole. Christ's sacrifice is presented as a counter-ritual where everything reverses in relation to the crisis depicted in the introduction. The charm ends with yet another invocation: "hjælp kære Herre Gud, fra alle Troldmennesker og deres Fordærvelse!" This takes in both the Christian God and the world of witchcraft. The introduction and conclusion frame the charm: from the very first word in the introductory invocation, "Nu", it calls for our attention through to the cry in the last line. This charm is silent about ritual resources, and there is no choreography for the action – only the flow of words.

Charms are a part of the history of popular religion and constitute a productive start for a more general discussion about the relation between word and action in religious contexts. Can a charm really be considered as a kind of prayer? Unquestionably. Prayer in itself is not a genre, and individual prayers can be formulated within different genres like litanies, spells, thanksgiving and much more. They can be integrated into formalised rituals or expressed as the core of an individual performance. The anthropologist Andreas Bandak (2017, 7) writes:

> The central questions revolving around prayer can here productively be explored as matters of movement […] religious figures such as saints, priests or persons believed to have God's special favour are besieged to entreat blessings and benefits in concrete situations as well as to direct the petitioner towards salvation […] the configuration of action and inaction as central, a configuration wherein human agency is bound up with ideas of more than human agents and their involvement in their world.

It can be difficult to identify forms of prayer in documents from distant periods and cultures. Prayer is always part of a ritual phenomenon formulated in a distinct cultural context and requires the agency of humans. As prayers, charms and exhortations establish contact with powers and forces. They constitute a form of communication that works beyond the everyday. When Nordic charms are studied today in their documented and archived form, they can be characterised as protective verbal expressions with Christian and non-Christian references. In their specific performance situation, they were thought to have had the capacity to heal or safeguard and, in some cases, a pronounced intention to harm other people.

Most charms express a wish to attain knowledge about the conditions in the world beyond the visible and still explain how people in the vicinity are involved. A charm identifies a problem, provides a diagnosis and uses the power of the word to solve it. A working definition of what a charm was in Danish rural society could read: the formulation of a charm is part of a local poetics and genre convention, can be short or long, and is often in a strophic form that can tell a narrative in several sequences with the intention to heal or harm (cf. Roper 2004). No matter how consistently the words are combined by a skilled performer, words alone are not enough. Powerful words link to ritual acts. Utilising Catherine Bell's (1992) conceptualisation of what a ritual can be, both space and acts are ritualised and become tools of the performance. Charms cannot be regarded solely as a textual genre; they were like conventional prayers tied to ritual acts. Such utterances were trusted to have an effect, and the charms provide a distinct chronotope where time, space and history are entangled (Bakhtin 1981). Although typically based on the power of words, in some cases charms were invoked in combination with the very conscious use of objects, signs and substances or bodily movements in more complex acts. What in everyday life was a gesture or a simple act among others is ascribed a special quality through its context as a ritual with the potential to change the living conditions for other people.

Religious leaders can pronounce authoritative speech from their privileged position in local society (to wed, name, consecrate, bless, or curse). In *Authority: Construction and Corrosion,* Bruce Lincoln (1994) analyses scenes in historical and contemporary sources to identify "discursive authority," with more emphasis on agents, processes and contexts than on philosophical discussions about speech acts. Lincoln regards authority as a capacity to produce the coveted effect by means of words (which may be ascribed to religious specialists) and shared perceptions in a local environment that makes this effect possible. This presupposes a shared acceptance of who is the rightful speaker, commanding the right type of speech and performance, on the right scene, at the right time and place, and, as Lincoln concludes his list of criteria: "an audience whose

historically and culturally conditioned expectations establish the parameters of what is judged 'right' in all these instances" (1994, 10).

The subtitle of Lincoln's book, "Construction and Corrosion," can be noted as relevant to the study of charms and curses. Discursive authority is never given; it is negotiated. Craig Martin (2023) adds in *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion* an important dimension when analysing the forces that are at hand when strong words are uttered; the authority attributed to figures not immediately present in the social context: gods, demons, angels, the dead, etc. Several of these are visible in the cosmological imaginary fashioned in the discussed charm, with undeniable rhetorical power. Accordingly, it is up to the speaker to get them on his side. The mentioning of the many animals – as such important figures in the charm quoted above – represents an unrealistic abundance. The catalogue rather presents a certain potential worth protecting, and the very naming operates as a protection for the animals and "Jordens Grøde."

Lincoln's variety of examples of how religious authority is constructed and negotiated in particular textual situations can be combined with another important issue for the history of religions: the charms are examples of both knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. Instead of asking whether people believed in the charms, we can consider the performance of them as an opportunity for communication. Ane Ohrvik (2018) has discussed Nordic sorcery texts, especially the so-called black books, as examples of vernacular knowledge production. Almost all charms have a clear direction, presupposing past events and pointing towards future courses of incidents. Thus, the formulas convey basic definitions that explain good and evil, identify problems and solutions, and carry notions of cosmology and anthropology. This is a prerequisite for sorcery imaginaries as an explanatory resource. The spells can therefore not be unambiguously characterised as productive or destructive. Rather, it is a matter of the importance of being aware of the shifting interests of the parties involved, both as figures in the text and in the ritual action that, according to the archived documents, are said to accompany the spoken words. A cosmology including an anthropology, rooted in local religious imaginaries, is mediated through charms and explicates the human constitution with senses and capabilities, as well as our relation to nature and higher powers. From the Danish charms, it is apparent that "Troldmennesker" were assumed to have special gifts and access to insights from past times. This is not least visible in the victims' counter-rituals against the cunning actions that were inscribed in a particular cosmological logic.

**Imaginaries of Malevolence and Resistance**

Charms are constructed with clear indications of persons, voices, spaces and temporality. They command and admonish, thus expelling what was once sent. In addition to the fact that the words spoken were thought to have a profound effect, most charms were entangled in some form of ritual action. They show how hybrid forms of religion need not be an epiphenomenon in relation to the dominant institutions, but that

they used forms of speech and action that were relevant to people in large parts of the Nordic countries for a long time.

In addition to charms being materials that allow us to observe what issues the rural population struggled with, we can read them to problematise the relationship between religion and magic and to study the linguistic and expressive aspects of materials from older times (Otto 2013). It is impossible to know whether people believed in the imaginaries visualised in the charms. A charm, like the one quoted above, puts words to existential challenges and concrete threats, but was it a comfort hearing it read aloud when health and livelihood were at stake? The verbalisation of problems at least made the charms a method of circumscribing the situation with words as an instrument; naming evil is a first step toward averting it.

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# DRINKING DANGER AND 'GIVING BIRTH' TO SNAKES IN *GUÐMUNDAR SAGA* D (AND BEYOND)

Davide Ermacora*

**Introduction**[1]

The 'bosom serpent' (henceforth BS) is a folkloric phenomenon involving beliefs and narratives about animals residing within the human body. This concept encompasses a wide range of creatures, "preferably snakes, but also lizards, frogs, insects such as wasps and flies; even small rodents such as mice and rats; or birds such as crows and ravens" (Pratsch 2013, 79–80, referring to early Christian tradition). For instance, accounts might describe a monk or a female peasant harbouring a serpent in their stomach. The reptile is believed to have entered when the victim slept outdoors with an open mouth. A common treatment involves suspending the afflicted person upside down over a bowl of milk, aiming to lure the BS out (Ermacora 2015, 84–87). BS narratives and experiences tend to appear among both men and women with comparable frequency and characteristics (Lévy 1906, 90; Bennett 1997, 229–31, 240; Knoeff 2009, 46).

My extensive research on BS folklore, spanning several publications, has primarily focused on pre-modern European lore while incorporating comparative analyses from various periods and non-European contexts. These studies draw from diverse sources, including medical treatises, hagiographies, historical chronicles, myths, fairy tales, religious *exempla*, and proverbs. The striking similarities in BS narratives across cultures provide valuable insights into shared worldviews, vernacular knowledge, and human

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[1] This article would not have been written without the friendly help of Francesco D'Angelo, who in 2017 provided me with an Italian translation of the materials from *Guðmundar saga* D discussed here. The author is also grateful to the anonymous peer-reviewer for their comments which improved the clarity of this article, and to Simon Young for his valuable advice. Gottskálk Jensson offered his philological expertise and kindly shared the relevant text from the upcoming new edition of *Guðmundar saga* D, for the series Editiones Arnamagnæanæ. Unless otherwise stated, folklore motif references are to Thompson (1955–58).

experiences (Ermacora 2015; 2017; 2020; 2023; Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016; 2017). Given that BS folklore involves bodily violation and is conceptualized as a disease, it is best considered a medical issue (Bennett 1997, 238; 2005, 40) requiring a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach intersecting ethnology, history, philology, and linguistics.[2]

This article celebrates Terry Gunnell, a distinguished scholar of Nordic folklore, by examining two BS legends from an Icelandic bishop's saga. BS stories are well-documented in Old Norse literature, as evidenced by the analysis of two sources conducted by colleagues and me several years ago (Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 287–92; see also Olley 2022, 101–2, 108–13). While a recent discussion by Fendel (2024, 270–80) on additional instances of BS in medieval Scandinavia was valuable, it tended to overemphasize learned textual influences from the bestiary tradition at the expense of folklore – the oral transmission of miraculous stories and experiences where "[t]here is no Ur-text casting a long shadow" (Bartlett 2017, 123).

To address this imbalance and highlight the importance of folkloric elements in the BS story-complex, I focus on "a strange series of miracles involving water parasites" (Anderson 2008, 37) recorded in *Guðmundar saga* D. This saga, the most recent of the four Icelandic bishops' sagas known collectively as *Guðmundar sögur biskups*, is likely an anonymous vernacular translation of a lost Latin hagiographic work, believed to have been originally composed at Hólar, Iceland, in the mid to late 1340s by the Benedictine monk Arngrímr Brandsson (ca. 1300–61) (Gunnar Harðarson 2021, 269, 271; Gottskálk Jensson 2022). The saga chronicles the life and miracles of St Guðmundr Arason the Good (1161–1237), bishop of Hólar from 1203 to 1237, and is notable for its incorporation of "descriptions of Icelandic customs and geography, folkloric material, and skaldic verse" (Sigurdson 2016, 4).

The integration of oral tradition in *Guðmundar saga* D has attracted scholarly interest (Ciklamini 2008; Skórzewska 2011, 11, 39, 99–100; D'Angelo 2019, 116–17; 2021). While defining 'oral tradition(s)' in the medieval context proves challenging (Ghosh 2022), oral transmission played a crucial role in the circulation of miraculous stories throughout Christian Europe, both before and after their written documentation (Lederer 2013; Bartlett 2017; Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2021, 192–93). Since Festugière's (1960) seminal work, researchers have increasingly explored hagiographic texts as sources of folklore (e.g., Guidorizzi 1983; Boglioni 2005; Golinelli 2012; Lederer 2013; Lloyd 2020; Gollo 2022; see also Cormack, this volume).

Influenced by this scholarship, I will provide a folkloric commentary on *Guðmundar saga* D, concentrating on two key aspects: the correlation between BS and gestation, and the concept of BS or its seed being ingested with water. The central narrative is the story of a woman who unwittingly swallows a small water snake while drinking water at night (motifs B784.1.1; B784.1.3; B784.1.4), her subsequent suffering, and her healing

[2] Not least, this approach challenges Western stereotypes by demonstrating the presence of BS in both Western and non-Western belief systems, countering ethnocentric dismissals of BS as products of 'primitive' minds (as exemplified by J. C. A. 1932, 160–61). For a critique, see Freed and Freed (1980, 402).

through Guðmundr's posthumous miracle. By analyzing this account in detail and comparing it with evidence from various periods and places, this study aims to deepen our understanding of the BS tradition and its significance in folklore and medical history.

## The Sources

In a section dedicated to miracles related to the body and medical problems, *Guðmundar saga* D (ch. 83) includes two lengthy BS legends in prose, both associated with Hólar. In the oldest manuscript, Holm Perg 5 fol., dating from around 1350–65, these are accompanied by skaldic verses recounting the same events. In other words, in Holm Perg 5 fol., each of the two BS stories is narrated both in prose and in a poetic redaction. The first poem was written by Arngrímr himself, while the second was attributed to the lawman and poet Einarr Gilsson († 1369?). These poems, which largely align with their respective prose narratives, are usually considered "later interpolations into the saga, written shortly after the composition of its original Icelandic version" (Guðrún Nordal 2001, 108; see also Sigurdson 2016, 40, 266; Gottskálk Jensson 2022, 144–45). As we shall see in a moment, this interpretation is not without challenges.

The two stories with stanzas are so similar that doubts remain as to whether they are duplicates. However, I will consider them as two distinct BS variants and treat them separately, as the differences are also numerous. Only the BS prose miracles are present in the oldest form of *Guðmundar saga* D, as contained in AM 397 4to (ca. 1700) and AM 398 4to (ca. 1650), and thus were presumably part of the original Latin *Vita et miracula*, which was translated into Icelandic sometime after 1344–45.[3] Both texts show features suggesting a Latin original, such as the use of *Gestr* for snake as parasite (possibly from Latin *hospes*) and Latinate figures of speech (e.g., *Quid multa? – En hvat þarf þetta orðum drýgja?*) (Gottskálk Jensson, personal communication, June 2024; see also Gottskálk Jensson 2022, 159–66). The dream apparition of Guðmundr also parallels numerous Greek and Latin miracles where a saint heals a BS sufferer in a dream (Ermacora 2015; 2017; Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 296–97).

As I mentioned, a related issue is the relationship between the poems and the prose text in *Guðmundar saga* D. This is difficult to resolve conclusively, as the precise dates of Arngrímr's Latin work and its Icelandic translation are unknown. Both the Latin text and the Icelandic poetry honouring Guðmundr likely originated around 1344–45, raising the possibility that the stanzas might predate the vernacular prose and potentially served as sources for the anonymous translator alongside the Latin *Vita et*

[3] The miracles in question do not appear in *Guðmundar saga* C, a vernacular text written around 1320, which seemingly served independently as the main source for both the anonymous translator of Arngrímr's lost Latin *Vita* of St Guðmundr and for Arngrímr himself (Wolf 2013, 139–48; Gottskálk Jensson 2022). While there is currently no edition of *Guðmundar saga* C, a preliminary examination confirms the absence of the two BS narratives (Gottskálk Jensson, personal communication, June 2024). This aligns with Skórzewska's (2011, 26) observation that "[t]he principal source was version C, but Arngrímr reworked his material thoroughly, not only by adding new miracles and his own glosses but also by omitting material that he did not find appropriate for the saint's image."

*miracula*. We can assume that the verses by Arngrímr and Einarr Gilsson were composed for the second translation of Guðmundr's bones in 1344 by the Norwegian Bishop of Hólar, Ormr Áslákssson. In 1345–46, the Icelandic priest Einarr Hafliðason (1307–93) likely travelled to Avignon with a copy of Arngrímr's lost Latin *Vita et miracula*, which must have been written around the same time the poems were delivered (Gottskálk Jensson 2022, 159–66).

The forthcoming edition of *Guðmundar saga* D will be based on AM 397 4to and AM 398 4to. For convenience, in this paper, I will use the edition of Holm Perg 5 fol. by Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1878, 172–75), which contains the youngest text of saga version D. This redaction is certainly more recent because, in places, the scribe has inserted Arngrímr's and Einarr Gilsson's verses in the middle of prose sentences that were perfectly intelligible before but have been disrupted by the interpolated verses (Gottskálk Jensson 2022, 144–45). MSS 397 and 398 are copies of a lost manuscript written before 1400, itself a copy of AM 219 fol., probably written in the 1370s, which survives only in fragments. These fragments, however, do not contain the text of the BS miracles discussed in this paper (Gottskálk Jensson, personal communication, June 2024). Key differences in this earlier version of *Guðmundar saga* D in MSS 397 and 398, compared to Holm Perg 5 fol., include the absence of Arngrímr's and Einarr Gilsson's verses, and in the second prose BS miracle, the female protagonist Yngvildr is unnamed and the miracle undated.

**Childbirth and Bosom Serpents**

The first prose BS narrative from *Guðmundar saga* D will be discussed below. The second prose BS narrative – the more interesting for our purposes – and the parallel poetic rendition by Einarr Gilsson describe the unfortunate events that befell a woman from the Westfjords named Yngvildr Magnúsdóttir. As noted in the previous section, her name is recorded only in the oldest manuscript that preserves *Guðmundar saga* D, albeit in its most recent recension, namely Holm Perg 5 fol. According to this manuscript, the events are set in 1343, marking it as "the last recorded [*post mortem*] miracle" of Guðmundr (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2021, 192; see also Stefán Karlsson 1985, 1001; Skórzewska 2011, 26–27).

Following the involuntary ingestion of a small, unseen snake (*vatnormr*) at night with a drink of water,[4] Yngvildr suffers stabbing pains from the snake inside her; the animal, in fact, went down into her stomach and entered her entrails. Her stomach swells so much that she needs a larger dress, and Yngvildr looks, the text states, as if she is carrying twins. It is said that fasting worsens the pain, but drinking as often as possible

[4] Unaware of BS folklore, Skórzewska (2008, 107; 2011, 196) realistically described the water snake as "some type of insect living in still water," essentially a sort of water parasite. However, there is no doubt that the *vatnormr* should be classified among reptiles (Wolf 2006, 67; Olley 2022, 108–9). Collins (2013, 159; 2018, 112–13, 117) has tentatively interpreted *vatnormr* as referring to hydatid disease, a parasitic infection caused by tapeworms, an interpretation that remains unconvincing. For the relatively few occurrences of the word *vatnormr* in Old Norse prose and poetry, see the *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*.

provides relief – the underlying idea being that the BS has its own needs for sustenance (a recurrent motif in the BS story-complex: Maldina 2011; Ermacora 2015; 2017; Hillers 2019; Olley 2022, 110). After three years of suffering, Yngvildr drinks the holy water in which the bones of Guðmundr had been washed. This water is poured into her mouth by a priest called in by kinsmen. The dead snake, resembling a small salmon with both fin and tail, is removed by the priest from her mouth (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878, 173–74; see also Reichborn-Kjennerud 1944, 64; Cormack 2008, 337, 350; Olley 2022, 101–2, 108–13; Fendel 2024, 270–80, all comparing other Old Norse BS sources).

The second prose narrative and the parallel poetic rendition by Einarr Gilsson describe the symptoms of the BS illness as a sort of childbearing (Olley 2022, 111). In both cases, the verb *fæða* ('give birth') is dramatically used in reference to the expulsion of the disease-bringing, body-dwelling animal. This fact itself is not particularly striking, as, in various cultures, "the word normally signifying pregnancy could be applied to denote carrying something in the abdominal cavity," such as BS and imaginary parasites (Ożarowska 2018, 61). Cormack (2008, 337) pragmatically wondered whether the second prose narrative from *Guðmundar saga* D described, in legendary terms, "a miscarriage or abortion." However, as Cormack also acknowledged, there is no actual, literal pregnancy here. Yngvildr only appears pregnant, as she is swollen by the BS.

Indeed, through an analogy, the text illustrates "the notion of a perverted pregnancy, where the feeding animal will eventually destroy the host body from within" (Fendel 2024, 271). It has been maintained that a good criterion for identifying pseudo-pregnancy in Old Norse literature is when the unnatural or false nature of the events is made explicit within the narrative itself (Olley 2022, 102, 113). Einarr Gilsson, for instance, explains in his stanzas that kinsmen knew it was a BS illness and not a pregnancy, as they considered Yngvildr's condition resembling pregnancy "an obvious deception" (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878, 174). As I will argue below, the same criteria should apply for analogical pregnancy.

Focusing now on the first prose BS narrative from *Guðmundar saga* D, it is told that an unnamed young woman acquired the BS from infected water because she forgot to make the sign of the cross before drinking. "The girl's negligence was punished. However, since she called on Guðmundr and asked him for help, he healed her" (Skórzewska 2011, 244; see also 2008, 114). The forgotten sign of the cross is noteworthy. Many commentators of *Guðmundar saga* D have not realised that in this very work, there is a cognate BS tale (ch. 44) of a shepherd described as "of little faith and foolish," who forgot to cross himself before drinking from a stream after work and was stricken with a harmful water parasite described as "thin and black with sharp points." The man let out a great cry and said that the BS had started tearing his innards. People brought consecrated herbs previously blessed by Guðmundr, which caused the creature to be expelled from his mouth and return to the stream. The story did not end well: "gnashing his teeth terribly," the man screamed a second time that the BS had returned inside him and thereafter died (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878, 87–88).

There are instances from antiquity to the contemporary period where the BS sufferer dies, but this is infrequent in the BS story-complex (Ermacora 2015, 96). In the above miracle (not all miracles have a happy ending, since saints do not save sinners from God's judgment, as Arngrímr notably comments!), the BS is not explicitly characterised in demonic terms (*pace* Skórzewska 2011, 145). In medieval hagiographic tales, the custom of making the protective sign of the cross before consuming food or drink to avoid contamination by demons or demon-gnats/flies is a relatively common trope. The forgotten sign of the cross is cited as the cause of demonic invasion, especially (but not exclusively) for clergymen, from whom such forgetfulness was not to be expected (see, for discussion, Klaniczay 2007, 208–12, 219; Herzig 2010, 68–72; Katajala-Peltomaa 2014, 113–14; 2020, 35–36).

As previously mentioned, in *Guðmundar saga* D, BS activity results in conditions similar to pregnancy due to external symptoms, typically a swollen stomach (the 'classic' marker of pregnancy). None of the characters involved ever believed or claimed that the women had actually become pregnant. This has been described as "pseudo-procreation," "acts of apparent procreation" that are considered false or unnatural in some way within their own narrative contexts, i.e., "*according to the judgement of the audience within the text* [italics in the original]." The term "pseudo-procreation," indeed, "opens up new analytical perspectives on the bosom-serpent motif in Old Norse literature." Defined in such an emic way, meaning anchored to the internal perceptions within the text, "pseudo-procreation" allows us to go beyond modern etic perceptions rooted in the true/false dichotomy (Olley 2022, 101, 108).

However, I want to take a further interpretative step around "the acute conceptual blurriness between pregnancy and internal disease" (Scott 2018, 341), and distinguish between analogic pregnancy, pseudo-pregnancy, and actual pregnancy in the context of the BS story-complex. In the first instance, analogic pregnancy, the symptoms of the BS condition mimic the appearance of pregnancy, but no one within the storyworld believes that the sufferer is actually pregnant. This is the case with *Guðmundar saga* D. This becomes particularly evident when men with BS are described as having symptoms similar to pregnancy.

In the second instance, pseudo-pregnancy, the BS condition shares symptoms with pregnancy. According to the internalised perceptions of the characters described in the text, the BS sufferer believes herself to be pregnant, and/or other characters mistakenly believe that the woman suffering from BS is pregnant. The narrator and the audience know that this is not the case. In the third case, actual pregnancy, the sufferer is straightforwardly depicted as being pregnant with a BS, and the whole event is characterised as "a horrific birthing ordeal" (Olley 2022, 102), where instead of babies, parasitic animals are born. Let me scrutinise this tripartite model in some detail.

In *Guðmundar saga* D, as noted above, we encounter analogic pregnancy, where the intrusion of the BS results in conditions resembling pregnancy. As Cormack (2008, 337) put it, "[t]here are plenty of miracles in both the European and Icelandic corpus in which an individual swells up and looks pregnant, but is not identified as being in that state." In these stories, the association between BS living in the body and gestation is not of a

literal, direct type, as it is elsewhere (see below). It is worth stressing that abdominal swelling is, cross-culturally, an extremely common symptom following BS contamination (Ermacora 2017; for just one medieval example among many, see Walter Daniel's *Vita Ailredi abbatis Rievall'* 39: BHL 2644, Powicke and Freeland 1994, 125–26).

Abdominal pains caused by animals living inside the body can also be explicitly associated with 'abnormal' sensations in the abdomen, which is another symptom of pregnancy. An illustration of this is found in miracle no. 26 from the *Ss. Mm. Cyri et Iohannis Laudes et miracula*, or *Thaumata* (BHG 477–79). This early Byzantine collection, written around 610–20 by Sophronius of Jerusalem (ca. 560–638), contains about seventy cases of miraculous cures at the shrine of Cyrus and John at Menuthis, Egypt. More than 15% of the miracles recorded in the *Thaumata* involve BS: "folklore motifs predominate in this curious explanation of disease" (Marcos 1975, 101; see also Nissen 1939, 359–61, 365, 371–73; Magoulias 1964, 147–49; Häfele 2020, 117-–21). In miracle no. 26, a girl named Teodora accidentally swallows a small frog with some water. Sophronius compares Teodora's stomach pain to the symptoms of pregnancy, and likens the frog to an embryo: "As it grew larger, feeding in her belly, [the frog] simultaneously increased the woman's pain, pregnant with this strange and hideous embryo" (Gascou 2006, 88–90).

In other cases, it is stated that a man with a BS and a swollen stomach looks like a pregnant woman. For example, in an African folktale of the Hausa (Edgar and Skinner 1969, 146); in a miracle (with a lizard) from the anonymous mid-thirteenth-century collection of forty-five posthumous miracles attributed to St. Margaret of Scotland (*Miracula Sancte Margarite Scotorum Regine* 27; Bartlett 2003, 122–23); or in a variant of tale-type ATU 285B* 'The Snake Stays in the Man's Stomach' (see Ermacora 2015) recorded in Ethiopia in a manuscript dating from 1682–1706. Here, it is said that a man got a BS in Egypt: "He lived [in this terrible state of illness] for a long time, with the snake in his stomach growing and becoming so huge he looked like a pregnant woman due to deliver" (Worku and Belcher 2023).

So far, I have discussed analogic pregnancy. The correlation between BS and gestation in narratives can take more explicit forms, manifesting as either pseudo-pregnancy or actual pregnancy. In both cases, stories go beyond 'mere' animal metaphors or analogies for pregnancy and/or pathologies, assuming a more literal sense. When the recounted events involve pseudo-pregnancy, the characters in the narrative believe – because of external symptoms – that women suffering from BS are actually pregnant with babies. This is exemplified by a legend collected among the Gond people in Central India in the early 1900s (Elwin 1943, 443; 1949, 388; motif B784.2.1.2 in Thompson and Balys 1958, 83), and by contemporary American and African American narratives (Ellis 1996). But pseudo-pregnancy triggered by BS affecting the heroine is also a typical feature of tale-type AaTh 883C* 'Innocent Slandered Maiden: Alleged Pregnancy,' or 872A1§ 'Snakes in the Sister's Belly: Treacherous Brother's Wife (Brothers' Wives)' (Ermacora 2023, 82).

In the case of actual pregnancy, the clear demarcation seen in both analogic and pseudo-pregnancies between BS incubation and the experience of procreation collapses,

or at least becomes blurred, and disease emerges "as a bestial thing […] closely connected with sin and animality" (Ziegler 1998, 47). There is usually more attention to the psychological perspective of the victim of a BS, who might believe herself to be truly pregnant. For example, there is a contemporary legend from Honduras about a slug that entered and reproduced in the vagina of a woman while she was urinating outside. Her belly grew very large until four slugs emerged; she raised one like a child (Martínez Reyes 2016, 530–31; for Hispanic and Spanish folklore on vaginal serpents, see Pedrosa 2022; Ermacora 2023, 97–98).

From the medieval perspective on actual pregnancy, relating to "a horrific bestial gestation" (Olley 2022, 111), let me now briefly scrutinise the 'Woman who Swallowed a Spider' tale-type, known from many Middle Latin, vernacular, and Arabic Christian sources from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. This tale-type recounts how a sinful woman swallows a spider to kill herself and how she is saved by the Virgin or a saint from both her sins and the poison. Sometimes, the woman is said to have committed incest or to have been guilty of infanticide. Occasionally, there is more than one spider, as the first was not poisonous enough, with three spiders often being mentioned. Sometimes, the spider or spiders are large, causing the stomach to swell, and sometimes they are ingested along with their web (e.g., Cerulli 1969; Murray 1998, 265–68; Lacarra Ducay 2023).

In a fourteenth-century Ethiopian version from the huge collection of Marian miracles, *Täʾammärä Maryam*, a work replete with folktales (Belcher 2019), there is a motif where a woman is 'pregnant' with a scorpion, while the scorpion itself is pregnant, too. It is said that the small scorpion, swallowed as a form of suicide, swells until it splits, releasing numerous young scorpions into the woman's belly. Healed by an archpriest, she "was taken by the pain of childbirth and she gave birth to forty scorpions, big and small, and thus she was cured from her illness" (Cerulli 1969, 158–64, 167). While other medieval versions of the Ethiopian story feature a spider (a tarantula) (e.g., Brown and Pukhovaia 2022), in the above rendition there is a possible linguistic shift from the original Latin *aranea* 'spider' to the Ethiopian 'scorpion,' via the Arabic 'gecko/lizard' (Awad 2015–16, 87).

Cerulli (1969) suggested credibly that the 'Woman who Swallowed a Spider' tale-type was transmitted from medieval Arab Christian literature to Ethiopia in the late fourteenth/fifteenth century, most likely via an Arabic translation or paraphrase of an Old French version of a collection of Virgin miracles, made between 1237 and 1289 in Acre. In the Christian Orient, the spider(s) of the earlier Western models is occasionally substituted by a gecko/lizard (three Arabic versions are known: see also Awad 2015–16, 87), or by a scorpion (in three Ethiopian versions). There is usually more interest in the medical symptoms provoked by the swallowing of animals, with authors lingering on the most gruesome details of the illness: the belly of the sinful woman is inflated, there are painful sensations like childbirth, and so forth.

**Bosom Serpents Swallowed with Water**

It should be remembered that the two BS variants and the associated verses documented in *Guðmundar saga* D describe thirsty young women who swallow a small snake at night. The woman in the first prose narrative is characterised as formerly "very careless and vain" (Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878, 171). She gets the BS as a consequence of her behaviour: "these serpent episodes are clearly moral punishments" (Olley 2022, 112). Additionally, in *Guðmundar saga* D, as we have seen above, there is a comparable tale of a faithless shepherd who swallows a water parasite while drinking from a stream, an unpleasant experience that leads to his death. Two out of three BS cases reported by Arngrímr "highlight the impurities in the water alongside the victims' impure faith as the root causes of their sufferings" (Anderson 2008, 37). An association between sin and disease is thus established, where moral infractions are sanctioned and 'corrected' by a BS invasion (Olley 2022, 109, 112).

Stories in which BS act as tools of God's retribution for wrongdoers are common in a Christian context, where disease is often conceived as a literal consequence of transgressing the moral/religious code (see Gardenour 2012; Ermacora 2015; 2017; 2020; 2022, 21). After all, "most cultures use legends about supernatural punishments to support the belief systems which govern both social and individual behavior" (Halpert 1980, 226). Knoeff (2009, 49) found "no evidence of 'animals inside' being considered a divine punishment." A further BS illustration (with a vaginal serpent) can be found in the hagiographic tradition concerning Gäbrä Mänfäs Qeddus, the most important saint of Ethiopia, who perhaps lived in the 1100s; his *Gädl* [Life] was composed in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries (Marrassini 2003, 120–22, 336–41).

From a practical perspective, the cause of the women's sickness in *Guðmundar saga* D clearly depends on 'impurities' in the water, leading to the involuntary ingestion of a harmful animal. This is evident in related miraculous stories where thirsty individuals (usually, but not exclusively women) drink water at night from jugs or streams. In doing so, they swallow a small, unseen reptile that goes down into their stomach and painfully enters their entrails, possibly growing there. The sufferers are usually healed when they are made to drink holy water, as Yngvildr does in *Guðmundar saga* D. Miracle accounts described in Old Norse bishop's sagas have been correctly approached as variations on international hagiographic themes (Whaley 1994). The same BS episodes from *Guðmundar saga* D can be viewed as "formulaic medical miracle stories designed to demonstrate the power and sanctity of Bishop Guðmundr Arason" (Olley 2022, 110).

One of the earliest surviving sources employing the plot examined in this paper is probably Antonius' popular fifth-century *Vita Symeonis Stylitae* 16. It is said that the swallowed snake (which should not be interpreted as "a leech," *pace* de Jerphanion 1931, 341) enlarges in the sick woman's belly as it is nourished there, and that her face becomes green like grass. Doctors cannot cure the woman until she is brought by her kinsmen to Simeon Stylites the Elder, who has her swallow some water mixed with blessed soil. The woman miraculously recovers (BHG 1682–85, Doran 1992, 94; for medieval iconographic evidence depicting the scene, see Michon 1992, 99–100; Tomeković 2016, 136, 183, 423).

During the Middle Ages, Simeon Stylites' miracle circulated in several redactions in Latin and other languages, in an "extremely complicated" textual tradition (de Jerphanion 1931, 341; see Moukarzel 2007, 365, for a poetic mention, dating ca. 1500, by the Maronite Christian Jibrāyil ibn al-Qilā'ī). Details, of course, may vary slightly. For example, in a late sixth-century Latin text, it is said similarly to the Greek *Vita* that the serpent grew inside the woman, whose face was green as grass. As for the remedy, there is no water mixed with soil, but solely holy water (BHL 7956, McDermott 1969, 36–39). The late eighth-century Latin rendition from the Acta Sanctorum (BHL 7959) uniquely adds that the serpent was in the woman's stomach for three years. This might suggest that the text goes back to a now-lost Greek original (de Jerphanion 1931, 252–54, 360; 1932).

Another, quite different eighth-century Latin variant is found in Heribert Rosweyde's 1615 *Vitae Patrum* 1, 10: 11. In this version, the small snake, swallowed while drinking water, lodges itself in the woman's abdomen or womb (*uterus*). When the woman is taken to Simeon, the saint orders her to be placed on the ground and water from the monastery to be put into her mouth. Simeon then cries loudly and pulls out of her mouth a serpent three cubits long. The animal immediately dies and is hung up there for seven days, as a testimony to passersby (BHL 7957, Baker 2004; see also de Jerphanion 1931, 354; Gardenour 2012, 69).

From antiquity to the contemporary period, in Europe as well as elsewhere, it is said that BS were kept as proof of healing. In several cases, we know that dead animals or devotional objects representing them were produced and displayed (e.g., in churches) as a 'sign of authenticity' to persuade the audience of the truthfulness of the narrative (Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 295–96; Ermacora 2017). The remarkable size of the snake extracted by Simeon from the woman's body is, of course, hyperbole to enhance the thaumaturgic power of the saint. A thirteenth- or fourteenth-century variant can be read in the Armenian Church Synaxarion: the woman with the snake goes herself to find Simeon Stylites and begs him to help her. Simeon then pulls a one-cubit-long serpent out from her mouth (Curtin 2018, 98; Mathews 2023, 9).

In the Middle Ages, "[t]he ejection of serpents that have invaded the body becomes a speciality" (Ogden 2021, 246). Depending on the sources, these ejections might be, or might not be, coloured by Christian beliefs on demonic attack and exorcism: "[w]hen a saint casts it out, the demon at first resists and insults him, then comes out through the victim's mouth, usually in the form of a snake" (Patlagean 1983, 105; see also Sigal 1985, 239). Several other medieval redactions of the tale of the woman and the snake swallowed at night are known. These may be attributed to different saints according to the principle that hagiographical *topoi* can be copied slavishly or 'adapted' creatively in transmission: miracle traditions undergo variations due to interrelations between oral and textual sources.

Some BS stories seem to lean strongly on the *Vita Symeonis Stylitae*. For example, there is the *Legenda Sancti Amatoris* 9, an anonymous late fourteenth-century *Vita* of St Amator preserved in an Italian MS. Here, together with the ineffectiveness of doctors and the remedy of drinking holy water, there is the detail, seen in Antonius and the sixth-century

Latin *Vita* of St Simeon Stylites, of the woman's green-as-grass face. The *Legenda Sancti Amatoris* seems to derive from a now-lost original written in French (Albe 1909, 79, 84; Grimal 1978, 108).

A miracle of St Petroc, meanwhile, as told in two different redactions in the anonymous eleventh-century *Vita s. Petroci antiquior* 12 (BHL 6639) and in the *Vita s. Petroci* 18, written around 1177 (BHL 6640b), involves a thirsty woman who drinks some water from a jug during the night and, in doing so, swallows a small snake which makes her sick for many years. She is brought to Petroc and, thanks to the ingestion of water mixed with soil, she vomits out the snake (now dead), three feet in length (Grosjean 1956, 162, 495–96; Doble 1965, 145). It will be remembered that the eighth-century Latin variants of Simeon Stylites' *Vita* have a three-foot BS. A thirteenth-century MS has, furthermore, the very same miracle associated with St Tecla of Llandegley: instead of a mixture of water and soil, there is only blessed water, while the three-foot-long snake reappears (Sharpe 1990, 171, 175).

The two BS narratives from *Guðmundar saga* D have important differences in terms of narrative and dramatic action, from the constellation of medieval texts linked to the *Vita Symeonis Stylitae*. Numerous new particulars are present. The second Icelandic prose story (and Einarr Gilsson's stanzas), which is said to have taken place in 1343, includes the detail of the BS illness lasting for three years. Again, think of Simeon Stylites' eighth-century Latin rendition above, which is probably the first source to give the three-year detail. It is impossible to know whether there is some sort of influence from Simeon Stylites' *Vita*, whether this motif had emerged independently (after all, "[t]hree is the favored mystical number of all times," Trachtenberg 1939, 119; see further Lüthi 1981 on 'the rule of three' in folk narrative), or whether both aspects played a role during the Old Norse ecotypification of the 'Thirsty Woman who Swallowed a Small Snake at Night' tale-type.

Compared to the texts examined above, the holy water in contact with the bones of Guðmundr seems to be a new detail. However, miracles featuring water sanctified by the relics of Christian saints were hagiographic commonplaces, and Guðmundr himself was widely associated with the holy water he blessed (Skórzewska 2011, 88–90, 232–34, 245–47; Cormack 2020, 205–6). The fact that Yngvildr is able to vomit the BS after swallowing holy water is a remedy that we have seen emerging multiple times in our overview of BS-related sources.

Finally, in the first prose narrative of *Guðmundar saga* D, the unnamed woman who had carelessly swallowed the BS is healed when she wakes up from a dream in which Guðmundr appears, holding the serpent in his palm and making a magical circle around it with his fingers (a quite unique detail). In antiquity, and later in both Western and Eastern late antique and medieval Christian contexts, the appearances of saints (or gods) who subsequently heal the BS sufferer through dream manifestations are among the most recurrent motifs. Sometimes, this is connected to dream incubation therapies (Ermacora 2015; 2017; Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 296-97; for Asklepios at Epidauros, Greece, see Ożarowska 2018; Scott 2018).

## Concluding Remarks

Throughout history, records have consistently attributed diseases and physical discomfort to animals invading the body. This paper comparatively investigated two BS legends contained in *Guðmundar saga* D about a woman who accidentally swallows a snake with water at night. The snake then begins to feed on her from the inside and grows within her. The first prose narrative from *Guðmundar saga* D establishes a clear association between 'punitive' BS and the protagonist's state of sin or behavioural abnormality, a widespread trope in medieval religious BS narratives. In the background, there is the broader theme of physical ailment as divine vengeance or retribution (on this, see Ó Súilleabháin 1973–74; Halpert 1958; 1980; Hand 1980, 57–68; Zaluar 1980).

In the second prose narrative, the symptoms of BS are described using the vocabulary of pregnancy, but no one in the narrative thought the female sufferer was actually pregnant – either with a BS or a human baby. I compared several late antique and medieval parallels where the same or very similar patterns found in the Icelandic sources can be identified. Some of these elements very possibly depend on hagiographic tradition. However, we should have no doubt that BS beliefs were present in the Icelandic and wider Norse folklore of the time (for additional evidence, see Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 287–92; Olley 2022, 101–2, 108–13; Fendel 2024, 270–80).

Intriguingly, the association between imaginary animals living in the body and gestation is cross-cultural, prevalent worldwide from the pre-modern to the modern period, in both storytelling and mental illness (for BS and the delusion of pregnancy, see Rouselle 1998; Lhomme-Rigaud 2002, 23–25, 163). In the background, there is a simple and persistent idea: the abdomen of the female sufferer enlarges due to a BS, making her appear pregnant. The animal itself grows as it nourishes itself, potentially reproducing inside and causing abnormal sensations in the abdomen, such as internal pain and 'foetal' movements (Ellis 1996; Ermacora 2015, 86; 2017; 2022, 20, 27–28; 2023, 82). Indeed, in the BS story-complex, "the 'false pregnancy' female-focused versions" (Ellis 1996) play with the idea that the woman affected by the BS is, or is not, pregnant. The audience knows the truth, but the characters may not.

Regarding the link between BS and pregnancy, in examining and systematising parallels in this article, I have adopted a threefold division which, admittedly, is not always easy to maintain (e.g., Ermacora 2022, 73, for the case of a Middle Irish BS hagiographical text). This involves establishing analogic pregnancy, pseudo-pregnancy (where characters within the narrative think women with BS are actually pregnant), and lurid stories involving the actual pregnancy with a BS. The latter is perhaps best exemplified by some horrific Ethiopian variants of the 'Woman who Swallowed a Spider' tale-type, where "an infestation of parasitic creatures" is seen as "a kind of polluted, perverted pregnancy that requires catharsis" (Scott 2018, 344).

The earliest source to employ the bishop saga's plot of the two BS miracles discussed here is probably Antonius' fifth-century *Vita Symeonis Stylitae*, a popular Greek life that later influenced – either directly or indirectly – descriptions of BS miracles across medieval Europe, Syria, and Armenia. The remarkable diffusion of these stories (Jacoby

1932; Reichborn-Kjennerud 1944, 63–65) should not surprise us, as they were easily believed from a medico-biological perspective. The idea that snakes, worms, frogs, and similar creeping or crawling animals, or their seeds, can be accidentally swallowed with stagnant dirty water, or with food and drink, and that full-grown creatures subsequently generate in the human body, is arguably *the* most widespread aetiology to account for BS worldwide (Ermacora, Labanti, and Marcon 2016, 296–97; 2017; Ermacora 2017).

The fear of pollution and the exotic or wild nature of food and water account for those miracle narratives which employ the motif of the BS swallowed with water at night. But some are seemingly independent of the *Vita Symeonis Stylitae*. One may cite the young boy with the lizard described in one medieval Arabic version of the *Vita* of St Pesynthios of Coptos. Pesynthios gives the boy some holy water to drink, which makes the boy vomit out "that lizard, and it was alive, and instantly he was healed of his affliction and was delivered from his pain" (O'Leary 1930, 430–33).

As Batke (2003, 6, 16, 112) explained, religious tales featuring BS "cannot be adequately addressed unless they are viewed as the result of the popular perception of healing in the medieval period." Realistically, this folklore – which we might call "bodylore" (Young 1993) – seems to align with Bennett's (1997, 227–28; 2005, 38–39) opinion that many BS legends reflect the prevalent fear of living conditions "where it was difficult for people to get clean water, which meant that there could be anything in the water they drank" (Eilola 2009, 237). People were anxious about swallowing creatures with water or other liquids that would then live inside their bodies.

Interestingly, there are instances in Europe where individuals are penetrated by demons while drinking or fetching water (Scafoglio and De Luna 2002, 38; Katajala-Peltomaa 2014; 2020, 37–38). From a psychological point of view, victims blaming either BS or demons consumed with polluted water can be seen as these victims finding an excuse or reason outside themselves for their various afflictions: "after all, who could be blamed for having a sip of water?" (Katajala-Peltomaa 2014, 126). Let us wish Terry Gunnell many long drinks to come. But let us hope he also checks the bottom of the glass before tipping back…

**Abbreviations**

BHG = Halkin, François, ed. 1895–1957. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca, vols. I–III.* Société des Bollandistes; Id., ed. 1969. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca. Auctarium*. Société des Bollandistes; Id., ed. 1984. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca. Novum Auctarium*. Société des Bollandistes.

BHL = Société des Bollandiste, ed. 1898–1901. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina Antiquae et Mediae Aetatis, vols. I–II*. Société des Bollandistes; Id., ed. 1911. *Bibliotheca hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis. Supplementi editio altera auctior*. Société des Bollandistes; Fros, Henryk, ed. 1986. *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis. Novum Supplementum*. Société des Bollandistes.

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# WHY FOLKLORISTS SHOULD READ SAINTS' LIVES (AND HAGIOGRAPHERS SHOULD READ FOLKLORE)

Margaret Cormack*

> A man called Sveinn Þorsteinsson was so horribly deceived by the devil that he almost threw off the Christian faith and entirely forgot the way of life that Christians are supposed to observe. It came about in this way, that he went mad on account of a monster which appeared to him to be an extremely beautiful woman; she maddened him so that he wouldn't have anything to do with other people. He wandered around in a daze and paid no attention to his needs.[1]

As pointed out by Einar Ólafur Sveinsson in 1940, Sveinn met an elf-woman, one of the *huldufólk* ('hidden people,' also known as *álfar* and *ljúflingar*) of seventeenth- to nineteenth-century folklore.[2] The motif of a human who vanishes for a period of time and suffers physical damage and/or mental disorientation as a result of a sexual liaison with a supernatural being is found in folklore collections from Scandinavia and further afield.[3] The present text, however, was penned in the early thirteenth century, in the

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[1] His behavior is typical for one who has had contact with one of the traditional otherworld beings of Scandinavia. Whether the being in question lives in woods, like the Swedish *skogsrå*, mounds, or mountains will depend on the environment in which the story is told. See references in Tangherlini 1995, 32. The present quotation is from Cormack's (2021, at 46–47) translation of the S version of *Jóns saga helga* published as *The saga of St. Jón of Hólar* (henceforth referred to as *Jóns saga*). This and all other translations are my own.

[2] "Lýsingin bendir á, að það hafi verið álfkona," Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1940, 155. We have no idea to what extent the *álfar* of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries resembled those who appear in medieval Icelandic poetry and poetic language. In particular it should be noted that Snorri Sturluson's division into 'light elves' and 'dark elves' is not attested elsewhere (in fact, Snorri's 'dark elves' appear to be dwarves). See Shippey 2005, 180–81 and Gunnell 2007, 127.

[3] Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, part V, 205–22 esp. nos. 45.6–45.8 and 46.3; Christiansen 1958, 123–34, nos. 5095 and 6000. Sleeping with a sorceress could have a similar effect, as shown in *Hávamál* verses 113–14 (Cormack 1992, 226). For more on such beings in Iceland, see Cormack 1992 and 2004, 179–80.

saga of bishop and saint Jón Ögmundarson of Hólar, who brings the young man back to himself by talking to him, and requires as part of his penance that "for the greater shame and humiliation of the devil he should be eager to tell this event to everyone who would listen, and he did so" (*Jóns saga*, 47).

Before continuing, let me make the obvious point about how saints relate to the supernatural beings of local culture as presented in ecclesiastical writing: quite simply, the saints are more powerful. How medieval Icelanders dealt with victims of otherworldly beings before the arrival of Christianity cannot now be known, but the church taught, first, that such beings were demons, and second, that the saints could undo the harm they caused and, if necessary, defeat them in battle.[4] In the present case,

> he who before that time had lived a life that was a burden both to himself and to others was now cheerful and pleasant to everyone, and took good care of himself from then on. As long as he lived, he thanked Almighty God and the holy Bishop Jón for his health (*Jóns saga*, 47).

The saga's author wants to be sure that those who hear *his* work, at least, would inform people of the restorative powers of men of the church.[5]

*Jóns saga* was not the first Scandinavian saint's life to record a story like the one quoted above. Half a century earlier, the *vita* of St. Olaf, produced under the auspices of Archbishop Eysteinn of Nidarós (1161–88), contained one – reportedly told to the archbishop himself (D'Angelo 2021, 271). There was also an example in the life of John of Beverley which appears to be contemporary to that in St. Olaf's *vita* (D'Angelo 2021, 272–73). Neither he nor I wish to argue for written connections between these works. Rather, as the recipient of this *Festschrift* has argued for a different motif, seductive supernatural beings are part of the cultural heritage of northern Europe, available for assimilation into whatever context was needed.

*Jóns saga* also contains the first recorded Icelandic example of the motif of the haunted cow byre:

> There was a spell on the estate at Hólar: there was one stall in the byre where there was no point in tying a cow, because every animal tethered there in the evening lay dead the next morning. One autumn, the holy Bishop Jón went with his steward to decide which cattle should be kept on the estate during the winter [instead of being slaughtered]. When they had

[4] Sometimes Christian prayer/liturgy would do the trick, as in the case where Bishop Friðrekr causes the stone in which such a being lives to split in two (*Íslendingabók Kristni saga* 2006, 35–36). A more elaborate version of the story, lasting for three days and using prayers, psalms, and holy water, can be found in *The Greatest Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, I:285–88. An herb with a christian(ized) name, *krossurt*, is mentioned as a defence against elves (Einar Gunnar Pétursson 1974 with reference to National Library of Sweden Isl. papp. fol. 64, p. 124); it is conceivable that this was a traditional function. Shippey 2005, 171 discusses English charms for protection from elves.

[5] We have only translations of the Latin *vita* of St. Jón composed by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, which has been lost. While the story of Sveinn could have been inserted by the translator, it is unnecessary to assume that this was the case; Latin saints' lives are full of similar material. Nor is there reason to believe that the tale was attached to Jón before his *vita* or saga was written down; we need not assume the existence of a historical individual called Sveinn who went around telling stories of his close escape.

> chosen, the cow-man said that there would not be places for them all in the byre, because one stall was useless. The bishop said it should be as he had decided and determined, and that the stall should be used like the others, and so it was done. Next morning people came to the byre and found the cow in that stall dead. The bishop was told, and he told him to put another animal in the stall, and a third; and both of them died. Then the cow-man said to the bishop, "How long shall things continue the way they are going?" The bishop replied, "This shall be done as long as there is a cow left, if God wishes the estate to be laid waste in this way." And after that the deaths ceased, and Bishop Jón overcame that oppression by means of his faith and steadfastness (*Jóns saga*, 47–48).[6]

A haunting at the end of the Christmas season and the subsequent adventures of its female protagonist have little but the date in common with later stories set at the turn of the year (*Jóns saga*, 73–75, cf. Gunnell 2004).

The Icelandic examples above are all from the early thirteenth century. A hundred years later, another supernatural woman appears in the story of Selkolla in *Guðmundar saga* B, from the early fourteenth century. The episode appears as a flashback, not having been mentioned in the preceding account of Guðmundr's life. A girl baby is taken for baptism by a man and a woman who seize the opportunity for some casual sex. After this, the baby seems ugly and evil-looking. Subsequently, it vanishes, and a woman who sometimes appears to have a seal's head appears in the area; because of her head, she is called Selkolla ('seal-head,' or, perhaps, 'seal-girl').[7] One day, when a farmer called Dálkr, described as lustful (*kvennsamr*), is working on his boathouse, a woman he believes to be his wife appears, and they have sex. It is, in fact, Selkolla, who is referred to as a 'fiend' (*fjandi*), 'unclean spirit' (*óhreinn andi*) and 'enemy' (*óvinr*, a term used for the Devil). The redactor of *Sturlunga saga* (Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 2021, II:69) refers to her as a *flagð* ('troll-woman'). Dálkr cannot be rid of her.[8] Selkolla attacks him and others

[6] For other examples see Cormack 2004, note 15. In that article, versions of *Jóns saga* are referred to as follows: A = S, B = L, C = H.

[7] 'Seal-girl,' also an acceptable translation, is the suggestion of Shaun Hughes 2022, 181. However, if Selkolla is, as he argues, a purely ecclesiastical creation, we should accept the story's own explanation of the name, i.e. that it was given because she sometimes had a seal's head. As noted by myself (2018, 80) and af Klintberg (2018, 64), the numerous place-names in the area where she appeared, and which are said to be named for her, are undoubtedly older than the story, indicating locations associated with seals, perhaps where they could be seen sticking their heads out of the water.

[8] "…var hann mjög máttfarinn er hann kom heim, ok or allri mannligri náttúru, og þó kennist hann við, sér hvat honum var orðit" ('He was extremely weak when he got home, and out of all human nature, but nonetheless was conscious, saw what had happened to him,' *Guðmundar saga* B, 605; cf. *Guðmundar saga* D, 78). Shaun Hughes (2022, 182) considers Dálkr's removal from (dat.) *mannligri náttúru* to mean that he has become impotent. Sexual drive is, indeed, a possible meaning of *náttúra.* However, the other seven examples of the combination *mannlig náttúra* listed in the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose imply a translation as 'human nature.' To indicate impotence, we might have expected **karlmannligri náttúru* ('male' as opposed to 'human' nature). Furthermore, the use of the dative case preceded by *or* suggests that Dálkr was removed from something, rather than that something was removed from him. Impotence does not lead well into the following phrases, in which Dálkr, like Sveinn (and also Sæmundr *fróði*, see below) retains or regains his human/Christian identity. The emphasis on human nature contrasts with what is presumably the ultimate aim of the attack, to seize Dálkr and transform him into a demonic being like Selkolla herself. An example of such a transformation is seen elsewhere *Guðmundar saga*: In

in the district, both outside and inside dwellings – she comes up from the earth anywhere – even approaching Guðmundr himself, when he arrives at Dálkr's farm. Guðmundr grabs his hose, which she has just removed, hits her on the head with them[9] and tells her to go down where she came from – which she does. He has crosses placed at the locations where she has come up out of the ground, and, when she appears in his presence, sends her back down into the earth.[10]

The story serves both as a caution against inappropriate sexual activity and as a warning that children should be baptized without delay. It makes use of numerous traditional motifs and situations. Selkolla and Dálkr meet in a liminal area (a boathouse, on the border of sea and land). Both Selkolla's transformation into his wife's form, and her ability to persecute her victim, even in his home, are found in other Scandinavian traditions. The fact that she emerges from, and disappears into, the ground, and a post (in the present instance, a cross) is used to prevent a return by the same route, is paralleled in other stories of revenants and spirits.[11] While it is odd for a dead-child being to take the specific form of a seal-headed woman, they were a well-known form of spook (Icelandic *útburðr*) both in Iceland and elsewhere (Pentikäinen 1968). Later on, the story illustrates the belief that evil beings cannot cross water; to do so, Selkolla must

both the B and D versions, Kolbeinn Tumason's wife is seized by trolls. Kolbeinn is concerned to get her body back in condition to receive Christian burial. Guðmundr recovers the body, but in no state for burial in holy ground: it is "blá og þrútin … og ólíkt kristnum mönnum" ('blue-black and swollen … and unlike Christian people,' B, 560); in D, 33 we are told "hvert ferlíkan var af ljúfum kristnum manni" ('what a monster a dear Christian person had become'). Only after a second attempt is Guðmundr able to bring Gyríðr back to life – "með fögrum lit og náttúrligu yfirbragði, sem fyrr hafði hon" ('with fair color and a natural appearance, as she had before,' B, 561); "mannlig mynd" ('human form,' D, 33). The dead baby whose body gave physical form to Selkolla had cried, like Gyríðr, and had taken on an even more evil-looking appearance than it had before, when the couple went back to see if it was alive. In another instance, Guðmundr was too late to help a kinswoman who wanted to know the fate of her son, who had vanished. He informed her, reluctantly, that the boy had been taken into the mound ("hóll") above her farm, but that "í dag nenni ek eigi at kalla hann þinn son, þvíat hann er þér ólíkr vorðinn" ('today I don't care to call him your son, because he has become different from you,' D, 140). Returning to Dálkr, the D version of the saga, which Hughes cites in support of his reading, is younger than B, and has been much changed, both in detail and emphasis, either by Arngrímr, the learned author of the original Latin, or his translator (for discussion of Latin and vernacular versions of the saga, see Gottskálk Jensson 2022. For discussion of the revision of D, see Ciklamini 1993). In the present case, Arngrímr makes Selkolla, rather than Dálkr, initiate the sexual encounter when she appears in the boathouse. In any case, impotence would presumably be the last thing a sexually aggressive supernatural would want to impose on her human victim. I note in passing that Guðmundr is not left "naked" (Hughes 2022, 184) when his hose are removed; Hughes describes his perception of the situation more accurately on p. 186 where he writes: "his nakedness is exposed" to her. It should be recalled that Guðmundr would have been wearing a long episcopal robe, unlike laymen whose upper garment might be a short tunic. As Hughes points out in note 64 on that page, the episode is an example of Thompson 1975, IV:381, K1285. Ciklamini 2008 also discusses this episode.

[9] *Guðmundar saga* B, 607; this is how Jórunn treats Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*, 28.

[10] The story is translated and discussed in detail in Cormack 2018.

[11] It might be presumed that revenants emerged from, and returned to, the ground because they had been buried, or, in Christian terms, because they originate in hell. The idea is found elsewhere in Scandinavia, see Tangherlini 1998.

transform herself into (or conceal herself in) a horse bone, itself a known motif (af Klintberg 2018, 68–70; Hughes 2022, 187).[12]

While the seal-headed being and precise details of this episode may, as Shaun Hughes has argued, have been invented, the author has made good use of numerous folklore motifs in his presentation. It is possible to accept ecclesiastical authorship of the narrative without rejecting the possibility that its author is adapting an existing story; as I showed in 2018, the tale underwent many variations in subsequent years, and it is possible that one of these, or something totally different, may have been a local tradition around which the tale of Guðmundr's intervention was composed.

Turning to another work, *Oddaverja þáttr* was probably written about 80 years after the first version of *Þorláks saga*, when a revision of that saga, *Þorláks saga* B, was made. The *þáttr* features a magical fog reminiscent of those found in sagas and folklore. Theodore Andersson (2021, xxi) notes that such fogs can be found both in religious and secular works; they surely belong to the folkloric background which could be drawn on by lay and clerical storytellers alike, whether presented orally or on parchment. We should not forget that before they took holy orders or entered a monastery – and afterward – the clergy would have been familiar with the folkloric culture of their countrymen.

In connection with the fog, Andersson concludes his discussion of *Oddaverja þáttr* with a comment on the transmission of oral tradition:

> If it is true that *Oddaverja þáttr* developed orally through the thirteenth century and was added towards the end of the century, that is a significant supplement to our studies of the transition from oral transmission to written sagas. We generally think of two or three hundred years as the oral term before a saga appears in writing, but I have argued elsewhere that it may have taken only about a hundred years for a tradition to morph into a saga . . . If *Oddaverja þáttr* is also a case of evolving oral transmission, it tells us that the mechanisms governing the passage of oral tradition into literary form were in full force during the thirteenth century (Andersson 2021, xxvii).

Andersson himself is cautious of assuming the development of the *þáttr* in oral tradition – and rightly so. As has been pointed out by numerous scholars – the arguments are repeated and expanded by Anderson – *Oddaverja þáttr* is an independent work which not only differs stylistically from *Þorláks saga*, onto which it has been added, but contains numerous errors which a near contemporary of Þorlákr would have been unlikely to make (Jón Böðvarsson 1968; Ármann Jakobsson and Ásdís Egilsdóttir 1999). In fact, the B version of *Þorláks saga*, in which the *þáttr* is found, contains both a prologue and a transition to the *þáttr* itself (ch. xx), stating that the existing version of the saga did not adequately treat the opposition suffered by Þorlákr during his episcopacy. The *þáttr* is presented as a flashback following a version of Þorlákr's life that is virtually identical

[12] It should however be noted that normally the evil being is confined or trapped in the bone (or bottle), rather than entering it himself. I prefer the idea that she has transformed herself.

to the earlier saga.[13] In fact, *Oddaverja þáttr* is a piece of propaganda from the time of Bishop Árni Þorláksson (1269–98) or later, designed to justify his attempts to gain control of proprietary churches by projecting a similar program onto his predecessor, a recognized saint. Such propaganda does not develop in oral tradition – it is composed, in this case presumably by a cleric, with a definite aim in mind. The fact that such a cleric had both saga style and folklore motifs at his command is not surprising.

I would like, however, to consider Anderson's argument that a hundred years is enough time for a saga in the classical style to develop in oral tradition. Without disagreeing with his argument I want to suggest another function for the hundred-year period. Instead of (or in addition to) being a gestation period during which a story can develop saga style and adopt relevant motifs, it is the time required for *forgetting* the precise details, and context, of an individual's life, giving an author more freedom to embellish his story with exciting episodes, and adapt it to current circumstances and stylistic conventions.[14]

Students of Cultural Memory distinguish a stage of 'living' memory – a period of about three generations (which in those days were shorter than ours), c. 100 years – during which there are still individuals who remembered the people and events under discussion. The fact that participants may recall the events in very different ways is another matter. However, during this period, presenting completely new material might cause raised eyebrows and perhaps arguments. Beyond it, however, many things are possible, and it is worth noting that all the really dramatic supernatural miracles in the sagas of saints (I do not count the everyday cures in the miracle collections, which themselves form a set of ecclesiastical motifs) are found in works written about a hundred years after the lifetime of the saint. The stories of the elf-woman, the haunted byre, and the twelfth-night attack in *Jóns saga* must have been penned by Gunnlaugr Leifsson or his translator after the passage of approximately the same amount of time after Jón's death as *Oddaverja þáttr* was after Þorlákr's. A similar period intervened between the death of Guðmundr Arason and the tales of his adventures with trolls in the B version of his saga. D, composed several decades after B, adds even more adventures as well as adapting material from other saints' lives.[15]

It is in fact possible that the same hundred-year period applied to versions of saints' lives as well. On p. 11 of *Jóns saga* I suggest that a chain of informants was created in order to account for new material added in the L version, composed in the early fourteenth century. Readers may have wondered why my discussion of that saga did not mention the story of Jón and Sæmundr's escape from the continent to Iceland. The reason is that this tale is not found in the early thirteenth-century versions (S and H) of the saga, appearing first in the L version. Another episode, which tells how Jón saves a

[13] *Þorláks saga* B, 144 and 161–62. The prologue concludes by stating that "sá góði maðr sem i fyrstu hefir sǫguna setta byrjar svá sitt mál sem hér fylgir" ('the good man who first composed the saga begins his story as follows').

[14] To speak of an 'author' is appropriate for an original saint's life, however that work may change in subsequent transmission and translation. My point is that we do not need to assume that folklore motifs are additions to or borrowings in a text or tradition that lacked them.

[15] See Ciklamini 2008. Some of the material she discusses is also found in B.

man called Gísl who has killed a retainer of Magnús bareleg, received dramatic expansion in L.

Beginning with the story of Gísl, in the S and H versions – as well as an independent but closely related *þáttr* found in the manuscripts *Hulda* and *Hrokkinskinna* – Jón is the only one allowed to speak in Gísl's defence, which he does successfully.[16] Gísl is given the place of the man he killed, a motif – complete with a 'head-ransom' poem which is, however, not presented – also found in secular sagas.[17]

In the L version the king shows no such mercy.[18] Gísl is hanged – and, having worn, at the time, a cloak that had belonged to St. Jón, he survives. Here the author adopts an ecclesiastical motif found in any number of saints' lives.[19] The L author is well aware of the existence of a different version of the story, commenting that "some books say that the aforementioned Gísl never was hanged, but received pardon and a full reconciliation, together with all the Icelanders who took part in the aforementioned assault, through the assistance and pleadings of holy *Johannes*" (*Jóns saga*, 88) – exactly what is found in S and H.

The story of Sæmundr *fróði* found in L is a tale that can stand on its own.[20] It starts in good hagiographic form; Jón recognizes Sæmundr, who has forgotten his baptismal name and Christian learning, and brings him back to knowledge of himself, much as he had done for Sveinn Þorsteinsson. From then on, however, the protagonist of the story is Sæmundr. It contains, to my knowledge, the first recording in a Scandinavian language of what Antti Aarne (1930) has called the "Magic Flight Motif." Now, *some* story about Sæmundr was known earlier – version H tells us that Jón "released" Sæmundr from his master and informs us that "there is a notable story about how he rescued him, though it isn't mentioned here" (*Jóns saga*, 33). Since H is preserved only in copies of a fifteenth-century manuscript, the reference to the "notable story" could be an addition. However, in the L version it is Sæmundr, rather than Jón, who engineers their escape; this might have been an adequate reason for not including the tale in a saga about Jón – assuming that the story of L was, in fact, the precise one to which H refers. Other versions were known in the nineteenth century, and yet others may have been current in the thirteenth.[21]

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[16] Copenhagen, AM 66 4to and Copenhagen, GKS 1010 fol. The common text of these manuscripts is thought to have been composed in the second half of the thirteenth century, see Louis-Jensen 1993.

[17] See Cormack 2004, note 39. *Njál's saga* 1997, 296 refers to the practice as customary.

[18] *Jóns saga*, Appendix 1, 83–90.

[19] For the Icelandic parallels to the cloak, see Cormack 2004, note 40; for the hanging, notes 43–45; for Gísl's feet being stiff where the cloak did not reach, notes 46–48.

[20] The L version is translated as Appendix 2, 91–93, in *Jóns saga*. The reasons why the story in its L form cannot have been in the original *vita* and/or saga have been set out by Peter Foote in *Jóns saga*, 111–20. See also Cormack, "Holy Icelandic Bishops in AM 219 fol."

[21] It is worth mentioning that Sæmundr's teacher (called his *meistari*, 'master') should not, in a fourteenth-century text, be interpreted as the devil himself. He would, rather, be a magician expert in ritual/ceremonial magic, a member of Kieckhefer's (1989) "clerical underworld" (see esp. 150–56) who (like Sæmundr in later folklore) controlled demons by virtue of their Christian faith as well as their esoteric knowledge, rather than being controlled by them, or being demons themselves. For this change of attitude towards magicians from the twelfth century to the Early Modern period see Cohn 1975.

It is striking that the redactors of later versions of the sagas about Þorlákr and Jón comment on the existence of other versions which do not contain the material they have added. A political reason for the composition of *Oddaverja þáttr* has already been mentioned; *Jóns saga* may have been produced as the result of competition with the emerging cult of Guðmundr Arason. Whatever the reason for re-writing or re-translating the life of Jón Ögmundarson, the person(s) responsible presented their readers with exciting new material – with which those readers might have been unfamiliar.

The motifs associated with Guðmundr Arason are another matter. While the existing sagas about him were clearly composed in connection with attempts at canonization in the fourteenth century, there is reason to presume that Guðmundr, unlike Þorlákr and Jón, may have attracted stories in the period immediately after his lifetime – this seems to have been true of Sæmundr *fróði* as well. Although (or perhaps because?) they were *not* saints, both of them lived on in oral tradition. Those responsible for the sagas about Guðmundr may have been inventing stories (I suspect this is so in the case of Gyríðr), adapting them from other saints' lives, or adopting tales and/or motifs from oral tradition.[22]

Why, in conclusion, should folklorists read saints' lives? In the first place, because they are likely to contain the earliest recording of a particular motif. In the second, because they provide valuable evidence of the universality and mutability of such motifs, which could be adapted as necessary to a variety of contexts, easily crossing the boundaries of secular and ecclesiastical, oral and literary.

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Another such magician appears in a story attributed to Bishop Jón Halldórsson (1322–39): *The Account of Bishop Jón Halldórsson* contains a version of the "sorcerer's apprentice" tale which, if indeed told by Jón, is from about the same time as the Sæmundr story of L. It is set in what is described as the most noble (*æztr*) school in Paris. Jón's teacher is not just his *meistari* but *höfuð-* or *yfirmeistari*. The manuscript containing the story is Copenhagen, AM 657 a–b 4to, from c. 1350. For other examples of the motif, see Christiansen 1958, no. 3020, "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book," 28–35, and Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1988, no. 54.6, "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book," 285.

[22] For Guðmundr see Cormack 2006, and the D version of his saga, which carefully points out the parallels with other hagiography. The author of course claims that the stories are similar, not that they were modelled on the earlier ones, which is however likely to have been the case.

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